

Training and assessing prospective carers during COVID-19



A resource for agencies using online technology to deliver
Shared Lives training and Step by Step assessments.

Disclaimer

This information is a collection of suggestions representing captured learnings so far and is not a prescriptive guideline.

Agencies will need to make decisions as to what is:

1. Safe and in line with current health guidelines
2. Best practice
3. In line with current State or Federal directions and guidelines

While the information on training and assessment below has been developed as a result of the rapid impacts of COVID-19, it is worth agencies and the sector considering what protocols will be put in place, and how these will continue into the future.

It may be difficult to immediately determine what is a temporary measure, and what will become ongoing practice options, but keeping track of success and efficacy of proposals will help to ensure that these learnings can be tracked in an ongoing way.

This resource was based on work developed by Fostering Connections, Centre for Excellence in Child & Family Welfare, Department of Health and Human Services, and various Victorian foster care agencies.

Contents

1. Available technology	4
Useful features	4
Challenges of using technology	5
Helping carers get online	5
2. COVID-19 and carers	6
3. Delivering Shared Lives training to prospective carers remotely	7
Preparing to deliver training online	7
Videos from Shared Lives	8
Activities in Shared Lives	9
Tips for training online	11
4. Undertaking Step by Step Assessments (SBS)	13
Attachment A: Technology for Training and Assessment	15

ACWA is delivering the following training in virtual classrooms for agencies that may need more carer trainers and assessors throughout this period:

Shared Lives Training Skills: ccwt.edu.au/course/OOHC102

Shared Lives Familiarisation: ccwt.edu.au/course/OOHC101

Foster Care Assessment Skills (Step by Step): ccwt.edu.au/course/OOHC17

1. Available technology

There are many different platforms to support training and assessments, some of which are in the table below. Consider which features may be most useful/supportive to your training and assessment of carers, as well as within agency resources.

	Cost \$/mth	Video conf	Break out rooms	Screen sharing	File sharing	Record	Used by DCJ	Links
Zoom	Free \$20.99 \$27.99	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	zoom.us/meetings
Skype	FREE	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	skype.com/en
Microsoft Teams	\$6.90 \$17.20	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	products.office.com/en-au/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software
Hangouts	Free \$8.40 \$16.80	✓	✗	✓	only via Google Drive	✓	✗	hangouts.google.com
BlueJeans	\$9.99 \$13.99	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	bluejeans.com
Whereby	Free \$9.99 \$59.99	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	whereby.com
Webex	Free \$18.95 \$24.95	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	webex.com

Concerns about the security of some of these platforms have been aired in the press recently. Agencies should make themselves aware of potential issues. A useful article is here:

theguardian.com/technology/2020/apr/08/zoom-privacy-video-chat-alternatives

A full breakdown of potential technology is available at page 15.

Useful features

Break out rooms—this feature lets you send participants into ‘rooms’, separated groups for discussion, so that they can work on an activity together. The host can enter and leave ‘rooms’ to check in on different groups. You can then bring all groups back together to present on their activities.

Screen sharing—this feature allows you to share what is on your screen with participants. You can use this to show videos, PowerPoints, and useful web pages.

File sharing—this allows you to send PDFs, Word docs, and other files through the platform during training.

Record—recording your training sessions and assessments (with participant permission) may be a useful tool in evaluating an applicant’s suitability, as well as improving on online delivery.

Challenges of using technology

There are several challenges in using technology, including comfort and competence of prospective carers, strength of internet connection, access to hardware and software required, and trouble shooting. It is important to test technology ahead of time both for trainers and assessors, as well as with applicants. Have troubleshooting links on hand during test runs.

Helping carers get online

Prospective carers may not be comfortable with technology. Workers may wish to provide a test run of the technology with carers to work out efficacy, kinks, and walk them through how to use it. This could be done by adding additional time before the training session.

Be Connected is a great resource for trainers looking for language to support people through their first steps to using computers and the internet and improve their digital skills.

You'll learn about the language and techniques needed to support someone, and the possible barriers that people who are new to the internet can experience.

Visit *Be Connected* to learn more: beconnected.esafety.gov.au/digital-mentor

It can be really daunting for people, especially older people, to get across new technology. Providing applicants reassurance that this is normal, that they are not alone in being new to things, and that there are ways to get support is critical.

Here are 5 things to remind people of if you're not sure where to start:

1. Visit *Be Connected*, a government initiative to increase the confidence, skills and online safety for Australians: beconnected.esafety.gov.au
2. Don't be embarrassed—many people are not comfortable with technology and have not had a need to develop this.
3. Reach out—ask a family member or friend whether they can assist you by walking you through accessing the internet through a computer or smart phone.
4. Work with what you have—you don't need expensive new equipment to get online. If you have a smartphone or a computer, you're well on your way.
5. Use what works for you—technology can be a wonderful way to stay connected, but there's nothing wrong with a phone call!

2. COVID-19 and carers

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness caused by a new virus. Symptoms range from a mild cough to pneumonia. Some people recover easily, others may get very sick very quickly. There is evidence that it spreads rapidly from person to person. The *World Health Organization* has announced that COVID-19 is a pandemic.

Ensuring that prospective carers have an awareness of COVID-19 is best built into the recruitment process at multiple points. This may occur prior to Shared Lives training, during training discussions, and/or ahead of assessments.

Agencies could consider:

- Asking prospective carers to review the information in this link and consider whether they have any further questions about social distancing, self-isolation and quarantine, mental health and safety, and taking care of a sick person:
[preview.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/how-to-protect-yourself-and-others](https://www.preview.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/how-to-protect-yourself-and-others)
- Walking prospective carers through the COVID-19 symptoms and asking them to consider what they would do if they or a household member were feeling unwell:
[preview.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/symptoms-and-feeling-unwell](https://www.preview.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/symptoms-and-feeling-unwell)
- Requesting that prospective carers sign a declaration confirming their understanding of COVID-19 and the importance of safety measures, and confirmation that they will contact their agency and/or proper authorities with any questions or concerns.
- Encouraging prospective carers to download the Australian Government's official Coronavirus Information app, by searching 'Coronavirus Australia' in the *Apple App Store* and on *Google Play*.

Protecting against misinformation is critical, so prospective carers should be advised to consider only official material such as that available through:

- NSW Government coronavirus page: [preview.nsw.gov.au/covid-19](https://www.preview.nsw.gov.au/covid-19)
- Australian Government health alert page:
[health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert](https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert)

3. Delivering Shared Lives training to prospective carers remotely

Shared Lives training can still be delivered online for groups and individuals. The modules have suggestions around adapting activities for one on one use. This may be found on the second page of every module in the *Leaders Guide*. Further tips per module are found below.

It is not appropriate to pre-record a Shared Lives delivery and send it to applicants to view. This will not be effective training as:

- Shared Lives is designed to draw out key concepts (e.g. repair parenting, promoting children's identity etc.) through discussion—either one on one with the trainer, or in a group. The content of the training cannot be covered adequately if participants are watching a video and are not getting feedback on their response to the material.
- Retention of information is increased significantly when training is engaging and interactive; watching a long video is not an effective learning method.
- Important information about participants' suitability is lost if they cannot be observed during training.

Preparing to deliver training online

We recommend breaking Part One of the training into more than 2 days for the 8 modules, and do anything from 1 to 3 modules per session, making it a 3-8 day training depending on how many hours your carers can commit behind a computer during isolating at home with other members (possibly children) in their households.

Before training

Agencies can help training run more smoothly by:

- Testing all equipment ahead of time in dry runs, and then testing with carers ahead of commencing training. This includes testing the speaker connectivity and technology to engage in the training successfully.
- Explore if agency IT support may be on standby on training days to support any systemic issues that may arise.
- Pre-plan how to pair participants into groups so that this eases the transition into group activities if participants are pre-assigned.
- Facilitators encourage more group interaction such as including the *What's In a Name* game (page 15 of manual) prior to the Identity module.
- Pre-recording some of the readings to ensure that members can hear the content and follow along.
- Posting out handouts such as the PACE handout and Take-Home message.

To make it easy for the participants to see the PowerPoint presentation you can either:

- Email participants the PowerPoint to play at home during the training session (using a free file sharing site such as WeTransfer.com), or
- Print the PowerPoint slides as handouts (choose 2 or 4 to a page) and send them along with this list of links to the videos to watch in YouTube.

Videos from Shared Lives

Below is each video clip that is embedded in the PowerPoint presentation linked separately:

1. *Removed*: youtu.be/IOeQUwdAjE0 (12 min 47 sec)
2. *Effects of Chronic Stress*: youtu.be/m35qT0C8LMw (3 mins 31 sec)
3. Dan Siegel—*Hand Model of the Brain*: youtu.be/gm9CIJ74Oxw (2 mins 31)
4. Sarah Naish—*Repair Parenting*: youtube.com/watch?v=Y-oWUZNhEXo (10 mins)
5. *Shame*: youtu.be/ul6VAIc3yWY (4 mins 9 secs)
6. *PACE*: youtu.be/-kL1y8obSi0 (11 mins 17 secs)
7. Josh Shipp—*One Caring Adult*: youtu.be/rFIUDTqxofg (5 mins 36 secs)
8. *Building Connections to Families* (formerly Understanding Contact): youtu.be/ffZcHbZ6B24 (8 mins 31 secs)
9. *Stolen Generations*: sbs.com.au/ondemand/video/633217091731/stolen-generations (3 mins 20 secs)
10. Support from caseworkers: youtu.be/XiBb45ng0el (1 min 29 secs)
11. *Jasmine's Story*: youtu.be/Dh8TTQY06mk (1min 47 sec)

During training—groups

Support interactivity and connection, and ensure ample opportunity to observe, by:

- Using 'Break-out rooms' (if available on the platform) to split participants into group activities which facilitators can also join to hear conversation and provide feedback.
- Agencies may consider, while not mandatory, to organise for a moderator/observer to be present during the training to document feedback into the training and identify red flags.
- For group discussions, the agency will need to switch the training view to participant view so that participants can engage in conversation more naturally.
- Encourage participants to take frequent breaks to stand up and stretch.

Between sessions and after training

Facilitators can email links to the training homework following the conclusion of Module 4 to reiterate PACE practice and watching *Matthew's Story*.

As there will be less opportunity for informal conversations (such as those that occur during breaks), facilitators may wish to call prospective carers in between sessions to provide an opportunity to ask questions, clarify content of training, and build rapport.

Facilitators may wish to consider providing an online link for evaluations, such as an online survey for anonymous participant feedback, to continue improving future sessions.

Ways to show the training videos include:

- Copy/pasting the link into the chat function so attendees can click and allow adequate time for them to watch during the session (for example, post the link in the chat, have them copy paste it into their browser, set a timer that is 30 seconds longer than the length of the video to account for speed issues).
- Sending the links to participants ahead of time in an email (not recommended as best practice suggests watching them in training to be able to address immediate responses).
- Using the screen sharing function in your chosen platform to show the video (some agencies have reported lag on this, some platforms seem to work better than others, and internet speed is also a factor).

Activities in Shared Lives

Prospective carers will need to have pre-printed their workbook (or agencies should do this beforehand and post to carers in time), so they can follow along and make notes as needed. Many people won't have access to a printer, so it is best to flag this in advance.

Some activities may not be replicated online in the same format, such as the Strings Exercise from Module 3, the tokens activity in Module 7, and the Jigsaw activity in Module 8. Agencies will need to find an alternative closing activity to the 'Picture This' cards and 'Strengths' cards to close the training days.

Activities by module

Module 1: Exploding Myths

If using Zoom, facilitators can engage the group in the icebreaker activity by using screen reactions i.e. thumbs up for one choice, etc.

Establishing group rules may still occur—this may be shared with the group visually by the assessor or through a group chat during training.

Group activities surrounding case studies may still occur.

Module 2: Loved But Not Safe

Groups relating to case studies may continue.

The Stand Up activity may be facilitated via reactions on the screen.

Agencies to choose if biological parents will attend the training, or they may play a video or audio recording.

Module 3: When Children Don't Feel Safe

Agencies may create an alternative way to deliver the Strings Activity via a visual representation i.e. a pre-recorded example or drawing out the attachments on a white board.

Module 4: Helping Children Feel Safe

Agencies may provide a pre-recorded role play example.

Agencies may omit 'Picture This' cards for an alternative closing activity that allows participants to express what they've taken from the day.

Module 5: Promoting Positive Behaviour

No changes required.

Module 6: Identity and Culture

Agencies may introduce the 'What's in a name' activity from Page 15.

Group activities can continue—agencies may choose to pair up members into new groups if possible.

The Identity map activity may continue as is.

Module 7: Everything Will Change

The Tokens activity may be amended—agency may ask the applicants to write down their activities instead of using tokens.

Module 8: Being Supported

The Jigsaw visual may be altered—facilitators may demonstrate a visual of the jigsaw on their screen.

Facilitators to provide an alternative closing activity to 'Strengths Cards'.

Participants to do an online evaluation form.

Agency to post certificates to participants.

Part Two: Shared Lives

Agency to provide participants with a physical workbook via post prior to training. The remainder of Part Two may be facilitated as would be for one on one delivery.

Tips for training online

Building rapport with prospective carers

Training represents an important opportunity to build rapport with prospective carers and leads to facilitating more transparent assessments. Through building rapport, agencies can answer any questions that prospective applicants have about their personal circumstance and support the applicants in developing an understanding of the system overall.

It is recommended that the agency provide the prospective applicants with a consistent contact person and with an introduction of the team to begin creating familiarity between the applicant and agency.

Agencies may wish to have frequent contact in between training sessions to unpack any queries that arise and explore the applicants understanding in practical application of the material.

Remember:

- Recognise the awkwardness! It is OK to have a laugh with the group, to note that things may be glitchy, and that you're all working through it together.
- Consider which prospective carers online training will work for, and who it may not work for. If someone is very uncomfortable with technology, consider stepping them through the process, or undertaking the training one on one.
- Have prospective carers position their computer or phone at the other end of a table, to give you an opportunity to read body language, including between co-applicants.
- Provide prospective carers with the applicant booklets via post or email. Agencies can also lead 'breakout rooms' on some platforms to ensure that group activities can continue as required in the modules.

Identifying red flags

By having an online module, facilitators may be less able to identify red flags in prospective carers. However, this is a general risk which can occur in face-to-face training sessions as well.

To mitigate this, agencies can provide higher engagement via phone or video calls to prospective applicants in between training sessions to recap their understanding of the material, clarify any confusion around content, and explore any areas of concerns that may have come up during a training session.

Tips

- Online training being delivered by **two** facilitators.
- Those agencies with available staff who currently do not engage an observer for Shared Lives training may wish to consider including a second observation staff member to monitor participant involvement and engagement and troubleshoot any issues such as IT issues that arise.

Resource availability

Some agencies may run on skeleton staff due to COVID-19, meaning more workers are attending to urgent matters and are unavailable for training prospective carers.

If agencies find they have less staff available to engage in training while responding to high priority case work, contact Jo Roach at ACWA to discuss our trainers' availability to deliver Shared Lives training to applicants: (02) 8974 9827.

Similarly, some agencies may not have access to online platforms that best support the training being undertaken.

Should you have any questions about undertaking Shared Lives training online please contact Jo Roach at ACWA on (02) 8974 9827

4. Undertaking Step by Step Assessments (SBS)

SBS assessments can be undertaken via videoconference.

Assessors are still required to demonstrate applicant competency in the SBS tool across all conversations (B-E for foster carers, and A-E for relative/kinship carers). Although possible to facilitate, it is important to consider this an alternative assessment method that is best supplemented with face to face if and when possible.

Assessors will need to be aware of additional risks that will require mitigation. There are several ways to ensure that interviews are consistent.

Interviews

Consider gaining permission to record sessions for later review to allow for any observations to be considered after the fact. Agencies will need to consider safe storage of these recordings to protect carer privacy.

Consider introducing a second assessor if available for a portion of the assessment (if assessments are usually completed by one assessor) as this could allow for greater observation opportunities.

Ascertain the quality of internet and any supports required to ensure prospective carers can participate with minimal distraction.

Determine the applicant's competency with technology prior to assessment in case any support needs to be provided to ensure a smooth online assessment. Some may find the technological aspects daunting, but as the COVID-19 situation is likely to impact contact visits and require ongoing use, now is a good time to have them determine whether they will be able to support this.

Ensure that applicants remain in view of the camera during the assessment to observe any verbal cues or responses. Have them position the laptop at the end of the table so you can see the upper torso of all applicants.

Agencies may wish to consider how the assessment will progress if household members are present during assessment periods. Applicants will need to find means to proceed with the assessment out of the reach of children to allow for safe disclosure of personal information.

Schedule assessments at different times of the day to have opportunities to observe the household routine and interactions in different phases. End sessions if there is a significant disruption and reschedule where possible.

Home and environment check

Agencies could consider the home and environment check being conducted as an applicant self-assessment using the Step by Step checklist, followed by a live video-link 'walk through' by the applicants with the assessor. In these situations, the home and environment check may be finalised with a 15-minute physical visit by the assessor to check the house for general cleanliness, hygiene, animals on the property and inspect anything else that the assessor determines as needing a physical check.

If the applicant does not agree to this, then assessment could be delayed until face to face interviews can resume after distancing restrictions are lifted.

Although possible to do online by asking for a video walk through, agencies have indicated that risk can't be assessed without some form of physical attendance at the residence. If an applicant is uncomfortable having a staff member in their home with them due to distancing restrictions, this needs to be explored and assessed. If an applicant is uncomfortable having photos taken, this needs to also be discussed.

An assessment for risk of coronavirus must take place prior to undertaking a home visit to assist care service providers to understand the precautions that need to be taken in different circumstances. Agencies must also consider the use of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment).

Agencies must also ensure that staff observe good hygiene throughout any home visit and are not unwell themselves.

Agencies must determine if there is any risk to staff or applicants/household members.

Should you have any questions about undertaking Step by Step Assessments please contact Jo Roach at ACWA on (02) 8974 9827

Attachment A—Technology for Training and Assessment

Zoom		
Cost ¹	Features	Tips
<p>Free</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40min limit group meetings • Up to 100 participants • Unlimited one on one meetings • Online support <p>Pro: \$20.99/month/host</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 100 participants • Meeting duration 24 hours • Reporting • 1GB Cloud recording storage <p>Business: \$27.99/month/host</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 300 participants • Admin dashboard • Cloud recording transcripts <p>Enterprise: \$27.99/month/host (Min. 50 hosts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 500 participants • Unlimited Cloud storage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video conferencing • Screen sharing • Breakout rooms—split your meeting into separate sessions • Recording and transcripts of meetings • Can schedule and start meetings through Outlook, Gmail, iCal • File sharing 	<p>Zoom is great for online workshops—its break out rooms function well, allowing you to send participants to other areas.</p> <p>Zoom meetings can also be dialed into similar-ly to a teleconference if need be—instructors could make sure to note which slide/page they are referring to so people can follow along at home.</p> <p>Zoom has provided handy tips and support specific to COVID-19 situation. zoom.us/docs/en-us/covid19.html</p>
<p>zoom.us/meetings</p>		

Skype		
Cost ¹	Features	Tips
<p>Free</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio and video conferencing • Screen sharing • Recording and live subtitles • Call phones • Messaging with @ function to notify recipient • Call forwarding and voicemail • Real-time translation • File sharing 	<p>You can conference call with people using the web app and people using their mobile phone number, which is great if someone doesn't have a strong internet connection.</p>
<p>skype.com/en</p>		

Microsoft Teams		
Cost ¹	Features	Tips
Office Business Essentials: \$6.90/user/month Office 365 Business Premium: \$17.20/user/month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio and video conferencing • Screen sharing • Integrated with Office 365, including Outlook and SharePoint • Meeting recording and note taking • Create teams, channels to organise your workforce and workflow • File sharing 	<p>Teams is an entire organisational system — not just tele/video-conferencing! You can instant chat, keep track of tasks, and easily share files.</p> <p>If your organisation already has an Office Business account, you automatically have access to Teams, which will be connected to your outlook and SharePoint accounts, making scheduling and file sharing even easier.</p>
products.office.com/en-au/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software		

Hangouts		
Cost ¹	Features	Tips
Free GSuite Basic: \$8.40/user/month GSuite Business: \$16.80/user/month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio and video conferencing • Screen sharing • Instant messaging • Integrated with GSuite 	<p>Hangouts is quick and easy — you can use it in your web browser, no need to download an app.</p>
hangouts.google.com		

BlueJeans		
Cost ¹	Features	Tips
30 day free trial Standard: \$9.99/month Pro: \$13.99/month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video conferencing • Screen sharing • Live streaming • Text chat • Meeting recording 	<p>BlueJeans lets you assign tasks during the meeting and replay meeting highlights afterwards</p> <p>BlueJeans is powered by Dolby, so it has very high audio quality — including background noise cancellation.</p>
bluejeans.com		

Whereby		
Cost ¹	Features	Tips
<p>Free</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 meeting room • Up to 4 participants <p>Pro account: \$9.99/month</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 meeting rooms • Up to 12 participants <p>Business: \$59.99/month (Multiple users and admins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 or more meeting rooms • Up to 50 meeting participants (12 with video, all others just audio) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio and video conferencing • Screen sharing • Meeting Rooms for each team • Meeting recording • Text chat • Emojis 	<p>Easy to join meetings—just click the link, no downloads, passwords or registration.</p>
whereby.com		

Webex		
Cost ¹	Features	Tips
<p>Free</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 100 participants <p>Starter: \$18.95/month/host</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recording and transcriptions • 5GB cloud storage <p>Plus: \$24.95/month/host</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign meeting host • Analytics and troubleshooting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio and video conferencing • Webinars and webcasting • Online training, including breakout sessions, testing, and e-commerce • File sharing 	<p>You can upload information about your position and organisation to your profile so when meeting people for the first time via the meetings function, they can read about you.</p>
webex.com		

House Party		
Cost ¹	Features	Tips
Free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Platform rather than for formal business meetings • Good for contact with children/young people • Built-in games, including Pictionary and trivia • Don't forget to lock your 'Room' for 1-1 contact 	<p>This app is designed for socialising, with built-in games it's great for contact with young people.</p> <p>Make sure you have a plan in place to ensure young people are using the platform safely.</p> <p>This is a very a public platform— it's designed to be like an actual house party, with people wandering in and out of different rooms. Once you connect with someone on the app, they will be able to join any 'room' you are in, unless you lock it.</p>
houseparty.com		

¹Features noted are not exhaustive—only relevant differences are identified.