



# Welcoming Families to Mobile Coaching

*Dear Early Intervention Providers using FGRBI and Caregiver Coaching,*

*We know many of you are transitioning to mobile coaching (e.g., telepractice, web conferencing) due to COVID-19 and may be concerned about how you connect with families and continue to build the caregiver's ability to embed intervention throughout their everyday activities. Or in other words, how can you do EI using technology? Yikes! The world is a mess; routines are disrupted; everyone is worried about life, finances, social distancing, and what comes next. But you know what, you've got this. Mobile coaching is simply a vehicle to access the family. It is not what you do in the session or how you coach the caregiver... it is just what gets you to the home- video conferencing vs. your car!*

*You are important to the child and family. Mobile coaching has a strong evidence-base and is a new tool for you to use in your ongoing supports to families. You may even like it! You know more about what to do than you are probably giving yourself credit if you have been using FGRBI and SS-OO-PP-RR. There is very little difference in how you coach families face-to-face versus video conferencing. Just like always, you will check in with the family, share information, observe, coach, problem solve, reflect, and plan with them. You will encourage them to use strategies throughout the day to support learning, to build routines to engage the child (and ones that also help with family sanity) and to enjoy these moments together as a family.*

*This guidance is to remind you to use the caregiver coaching approach that you have been working so hard to learn and apply. You do not need to let the medical model telepractice strategies seen on many online training materials interfere with what you know and do and how you interact with families. Be true to the principles and practices of Part C Early Intervention and to your program's vision for building the family's capacity to support their child's growth and development.*

*And remember, you've got this! The FGRBI Key Indicators will guide your session via mobile coaching with a few adaptations here and there to meet each family's priorities and technology access.*

*Best,  
The FGRBI Team*

## First... get yourself ready!!

### *Prepare for change*

- **Be confident.** Check the evidence that shows the success of web conferencing in EI in coaching diverse families and children.
- **Be sure you are knowledgeable about your own equipment.** If you are using a laptop or desktop computer, be sure you are using your video conferencing service with the most "family-friendly" settings. Use the settings where the family can see you, and you can see them. Have your name by your picture, especially if you are new to the family, so they know who you are. Know the chat feature so you can troubleshoot with the family if they are having audio problems.
- **Practice in advance.** Try your technology out by practicing with a member of your family or a colleague. This helps you get the basics ready before your session.
- **Set up your space.** Clear your desktop! Do not have any confidential files or names of families visible. Adjust your lighting. Use a lamp to increase light and cover windows to minimize glare. Check the wall/room decorations behind you (it will show in the video!) Avoid distractions in your environment as much as possible.
- **Have backups ready.** Bandwidth may (or will) be a problem. Get as close to your router as possible. Shut off all other programs on your device to save bandwidth. Use a hotspot if you have one available on days when the internet is particularly troublesome. Make sure everything is charged and always have power sources available.
- **Be ready to use your phone for audio if needed.** It can also serve as back up if bandwidth is a problem for you and the family. Coaching by phone can be powerful, too (just not as powerful as video conferencing.)



### *Prepare for the family contact*



- **Individualize family contacts.** As you prepare to contact the family, think about how the COVID-19 virus impacts them individually. Review the child and family records before you contact them. Reflect on what their lives may be like now. Are they suddenly unemployed, juggling work with their kids all home, trying to navigate through at-home learning for their older kids, worrying about losing their business, unsure about loved ones far away, scared for their health, or the health of their family? Reflect on how you offer them support navigating the additional stressors while they also focus on their child's early intervention priorities. Ask yourself, what can you do that will support them right now?
- **Prepare to discuss technology.** Reflect on their technology and be ready to discuss options that work for them. Be prepared to share the technology with other family members' responsibilities and schedules. Many caregivers are working from home, and siblings may be attending classes online. Respect their schedule.

- **Be ready to teach technology.** While some parents are expert technology users, others aren't. They may not have room for another app on their phone or unlimited data. Be ready to share available resources from local providers if possible. Offer to practice using their technology if they would like. Be clear and concise about the technology that can be used as you suggest mobile coaching and share with them how their participation could benefit their child and family. The more fluent you are with the technology, the more you can focus on the conversation with the family.

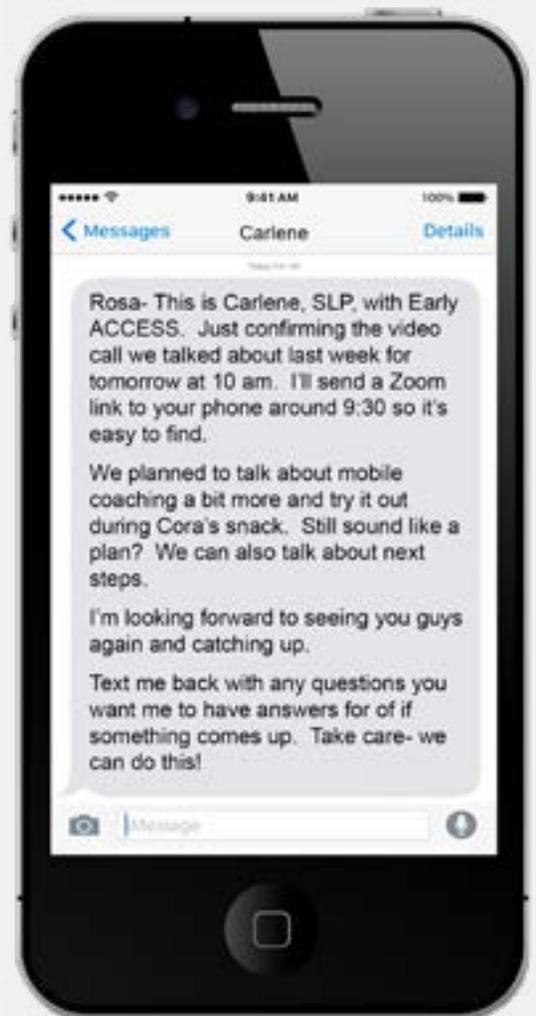
## Then... prepare to welcome the family!

*Many families will welcome this opportunity. Others may not. What do you do?*

- **Make your first connection with the family in a manner that is familiar to them.** Connecting with families you work with will be easier since they know you. Text, email, or call to set up a time to visit. Find the best time for the family (or better times at least) to connect realizing their world may be very different than it was on your last session. Your first responsibility is to the child and family.
- **For initial session, try sharing a brief text or email that confirms your contact.** This is not intended to be a to-do list for the family, but rather your phone number or email and a bulleted list of what to expect.

### *During the initial mobile coaching session*

- **Share your message.** Start your conversation by checking in on the family as a whole as well as the child. Listen. Care. Your relationship with the family is critical to their decision to participate in EI at this time. EI should be something that reduces their stress, not something that adds to it.
- **Be prepared for interruptions.** If there are other children, they will be home. There may be TV, music, loud voices, etc. that distract or call the parent's attention away from your call. Siblings may be in online school sessions. The family may have a new schedule they are trying to follow. There really is no way to anticipate what will happen next, so have your message ready. And above all else, do not let distractions get to you. You are there to support the child and family. In fact, you might be able to support them best by checking in on what is most challenging! What can you do immediately to help them and their child participate meaningfully throughout the day with the family?
- **You may experience an audio lag time.** Take a moment to explain this to parents who are not familiar with the delay between sending and receiving a message. Be careful to guard against talking over the parent. Give them time and encourage them to share their thoughts and questions. The more comfortable your conversation is with them, the more confident they will be that this option can work for them.



- **Don't give up if the family is not ready yet for mobile coaching.** Be prepared to offer options, including a text or a return call at a later date, if the family is not ready to commit. They may need to get into a home routine first to see what will work. Ask when is a good time to contact and check back in. And respect their decision that this service is not for them if they decide not to participate.
- **Stay in touch.** Put it on your calendar to text, email, or leave a voice mail. Let the family know you are available. Think of the information you can share to help their child learn (e.g., send a fun activity for the child and/or siblings; share an online storybook reading link or a YouTube video that relates to the child's targets). Maybe, they would send a short video of their child in a routine or activity to you if you asked. Stay relevant to them without adding too many contacts to their life. There are many ways to continue to support them.

### *When the family agrees to participate*

- **Make the session workable for their schedule and technology preference.** Collaborate on the way to check-in before the session to plan (e.g., text, call) and collect updates. You want to be ready for the mobile session rather than warming up to it at the beginning in case time is shortened by bandwidth or interruptions. Planning is important.



- **Make your mobile coaching, well... mobile!** Encourage the use of technology that really is mobile so you can join them in routines around the house as you would if you were visiting in person. Moving the laptop, phone, or iPad from the table to the kitchen counter and to the floor becomes second nature after a few sessions.

Provide the family with a shortlist of strategies to make mobile coaching as natural and fluid as possible... little things like how to stabilize the tablet on the kitchen counter while doing dishes together can be really helpful to make sure the caregiver gets the most they can from your coaching. If your family is using a phone or tablet and has a tripod, use it. If they don't have a tripod handy, give them some suggestions of items that they may have around the house that will work for keeping their device stable (e.g., books, jelly jars, cereal boxes, shelves, windowsills).

- **Ask the family's permission to record from your computer.** This will allow you to share info back with the family for the next session as well as review what the child is doing to monitor progress. (And you can use for coaching feedback if you are in FGRBI PD.)
- **Be flexible on session length.** Initially, spend the amount of time that it takes to accomplish the caregiver's goals. If you have specific IFSP requirements, discuss with the caregiver how to meet them after you get started. Getting started on a positive path is important. You can add more time to the session as needed when comfort with the process increases.
- **Plan, but be prepared to improvise.** During your joint pre-session planning, identify 2-3 routines and activities. Have a few backup ideas ready to revise or expand in the session if appropriate. You know from experience that new opportunities for building routines occur when you are observing. Make the most of the opportunities you see by asking if the caregiver is interested in trying something new. For example, big brother kicks a ball into the living room where the caregiver and child are playing. Ask if that could be a game for both children and problem solve how the child's targets could be embedded.

## Using SS-OO-PP-RR in Mobile Coaching

### *Setting the Stage*

- **Double check your plan.** You may have already completed part of Setting the Stage during your text, call, or email for planning. Do a quick recheck with the caregiver to make sure it is still a viable plan when you get online. Encourage the caregiver to take the lead sharing the session plan.
- **Take a moment for family updates.** Spend a few minutes at the beginning of the session to catch up- don't forget to check in on the family as a whole. Updates might be quick, but don't rush. You don't want to lose your connectedness to the family, and the information may be critical for problem solving and planning later in the session.
- **Review priorities.** COVID-19 could be a time when priorities change to address family circumstances. It's an excellent time to connect the current target to the child's outcome to remind caregivers how smaller steps build to the bigger outcome desired. Caregivers may also need a booster shot on the importance of their role in their child's brain development and how to nurture learning in stressful times. Knowing why they are embedding intervention motivates them to keep going during tough times.



### *Observation and Opportunities to Embed*

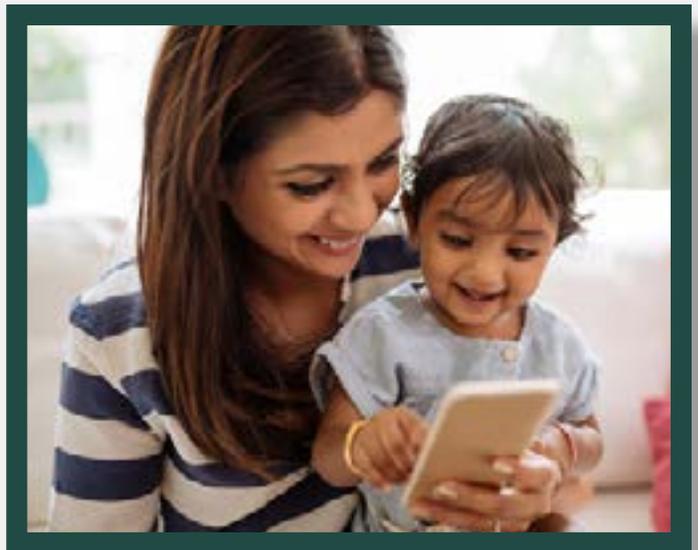


- **Observation and feedback continue to be crucial to build the caregiver's confidence to embed strategies.** Watch the parent and child interact in the routine and provide strengths-based feedback. Start where they are in this session, and do not be surprised if it looks different than it did previously. Observation of what is happening is worth the time. You need to see and know their new reality. Caregivers will benefit from your feedback on what you see that is working for them now. They will also appreciate knowing that everything hasn't changed; routines and shared interactions are still important and positive.
- **Your observation will help you know the coaching strategies to use next.** Is the intervention strategy working well for the caregiver and child? Is it time to review the features of the specific strategy with some direct teaching? Could the caregiver use wait time or providing a touch cue where it would provide a practice opportunity for the child? Is the routine going well, and it's time to up the ante a little for the child to respond more independently or more frequently? Is it time for new targets, or does the parent want to stick with what is working for now and try the strategy in a new routine? Observation gives you a window into the interactions with the siblings and other adults too. Is it time to add new participants, e.g., siblings into the routine? If dad or other relatives are there as well, who else could participate? Observe dad while washing the dishes to build on those interactions too.

- **The caregiver and child do not need to stay in one place for mobile coaching; go where the routines occur.** Again, do not try to do everything while the child is in the highchair for ease of technology use. A highchair is a great place for a snack and maybe some toy play while mom is cooking in the kitchen, but remember, you are not providing therapy with the child. This is not a medical model. You are coaching the caregiver in their daily routines; we are not bringing their routines to the high chair.
- **Start small.** Mobile coaching sessions may have fewer routines than a single face-to-face home visit initially, but that does not mean that multiple routines for practice aren't important! Have a couple of backup ideas in addition to the plan based on what you have learned about the family's routines in case it doesn't go as planned. That doesn't mean you prepare lessons to use online. It means you observe what is happening at home, reflect and problem solve with the caregiver about potential ideas, and then practice and coach on the caregivers' choices. Remember, transitioning between activities can be an important routine too! Children have many transitions every day.
- **The camera can move with the flow of the session.** Help the caregiver learn how to position the camera good enough to get in the frame. Families might need to practice to get used to "bringing" you and the device from room to room, but it will become a part of the session with practice.
- **At first, the phone, laptop, or tablet may be interesting to the child.** Quietly watching and waiting helps prevent the child from being distracted by you and your voice on the phone or tablet. The child will be more interested in the interaction with the caregiver when it is one they prefer and one in which they have a role for participation. Make sure you set the caregiver up to be interacting with the child.
- **Maximize coaching times.** Caregivers can also share brief video examples before or during the session for your feedback and problem solving if it is not a good time to observe and coach in that routine. The child's schedule may be off due to the changes in the family's life.

### *Problem Solving and Planning*

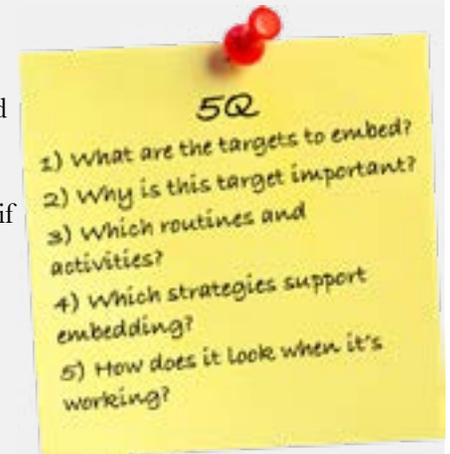
- **Problem solving interactions are more important than ever.** Building the caregiver's confidence to embed intervention and to make adaptations as needed is integral to your mobile coaching. We all know change is constant these days! Problem solving with caregivers about how to be flexible and have backup plans for embedding intervention will go a long way to help them. What adaptations could the caregiver consider to help the child participate and use the target skills? What would they change the next time? How can the siblings help? What else can they do since they are not out and about in the community? How can they find time for quiet play? Exercise? Fun?
- **Physical/social distancing itself might bring new routines to the family.** Video chatting with grandma might be a new routine, and others may have changed shape drastically, e.g., trips to the park might be replaced with backyard free play; shopping trips might turn into an online pickup. Families' lives may feel upended, so providing feedback about how they are helping their child across the day builds a family's feelings of confidence and competence in otherwise uncertain times. Pictures and videos sent between sessions by the family might give you insight into parts of their day you didn't know much about and could start to use conversations about embedding intervention.



- **Problem solving may also be needed to manage the session.** Siblings may need attention, the TV volume may suddenly increase, or the pets may join in where they were not supposed to be! Stay calm, just like you do in person. It happens. Time spent with the caregiver problem solving on how to arrange the environment, build routines for the family, support each other's own ways of coping, preventing meltdowns, and finding time to have fun will all provide support for the child as well as the family.

## Reflection and Review

- **Summarize the session.** Review to see how the caregiver thinks the routines and strategies went during the session. Did they do anything different this time that seemed to work? Did their child do something new and unexpected? Was a strategy more challenging than they first thought? What stood out to them in the interaction? What's one thing that worked well that they want to continue? You may consider doing this via text after the session if the session is busy.
- **Make a plan for between sessions just like if you were face-to-face.** What targets does the caregiver want the child to work on? In which routines will they practice? What strategies will they use to help the child reach the target? How will they know that the plan is working? These conversations might be quick, but they are critical to the family's ability to embed intervention between coaching sessions. Remember to use the 5Q to guide the family's decision-making and action planning.
- **Use technology to recap the plan.** Provide the family with choices for how they would like to receive their session recap. You could text or email your notes from the session or save some time at the end of your session for the caregiver to jot them down. If your session ends abruptly (e.g., loss of connection, interruption), make sure to follow up via text or email to be sure the family has a plan to embed intervention during the week.



## Preparing for future sessions

- **It's a good time for reflection and review by you about the session too.** How did you facilitate the caregiver feeling confident they can support their child's learning? How do you know the caregiver was making decisions and becoming more independent embedding intervention strategies? What did you say, or do that encouraged them to initiate ideas and options of what they want to do? What made them smile?
- **Reflect on your competence and confidence.** What worked best for you? What didn't? What technology glitches occurred that you weren't ready for, but want to be next time? What words did you use that connected with the caregiver when you weren't there for hands-on? What did you try that you are going to do again? What made you smile? Try to take a few moments to quickly jot down any thoughts you had during the session so you can remember for next time.
- **And if you are in FGRBI PD,** watch your video and share it with your FGRBI coach and team members (with parent permission, of course). Gather ideas from them on what worked and what you might try next. Which of the FGRBI Key Indicators did you see? What do you need to modify and try the next time?

### Note:

The material in this tip sheet is not all-inclusive and focuses on the implementation of Family Guided Routines Based Intervention (FGRBI). As a provider, you must follow your agency, state, and federal regulatory guidelines. Please refer to the [Early Childhood Technical Assistance \(ECTA\) Center](#) for further information.