EarlyON Child & Family Centres

Virtual Services Guidelines

2025

Presented by:

District of Nipissing Social

Services Administration Board

District of Nipissing
Social Services
Administration Board

Conseil d'administration
des services sociaux
du district de Nipissing

Table of Contents

Purpose

The objective of the Virtual Services Guidelines is to build on the Ministry of Education and DNSSAB's foundational EarlyON documents to provide information about the specific service standards and operational processes that are applicable to virtual program delivery.

Overview

Virtual Services for EarlyON Centres use web-based and telephone platforms to deliver services to maintain relationships and support families. Virtual Services can be used to introduce families to EarlyON Centres and provide information and resources for new as well as frequent EarlyON participants. EarlyON service providers can post or facilitate activities and resources appropriate to children aged birth to six that supports all areas of development and activities and resources that supports the needs of parents and caregivers and connects them to services in the community.

Virtual services include the following types of programming:

- Interactive child-focused sessions: Interactive sessions held virtually through an online platform. Children and parents/caregivers log-in to a virtual meeting and can participate in guided activities (e.g., family gathering time, storytelling, arts or fitness activities).
- Recorded child-focused sessions: Videos developed by EarlyON program staff that are pre-recorded and available for the public to watch online.
- Facilitated parent/caregiver discussions: These are virtual meetings held for parents and/or caregivers to discuss topics related to their children aged 0-6 years old.
- Scheduled teleconferences/videoconferences and phone calls with parents/caregivers. These services could be used to connect families with needed resources, support system navigation, have conversations about a child's development/parenting, etc.

Outcome

Virtual Services for EarlyON centres will provide opportunities for families in the District of Nipissing to gain access to EarlyON services and information when they are not able to attend programs in-person (e.g. unplanned closures, inclement weather, etc.) or prefer to access services virtually. Virtual Services are intended to build awareness of EarlyON programs and services and meet the core services mandated by the Province of Ontario: Supporting Early Learning and Development, Engaging Parents and Caregivers, and Making Connections for Families. EarlyON virtual programs and services are expected to use How Does Learning Happen? (HDLH), Ontario's Pedagogy for the early years, to guide the development and delivery of all programs. HDLH supports the adoption of a common pedagogical approach across early years settings, based on the four foundations for learning: belonging, well-being, engagement and expression.

Standards for EarlyON Virtual Services

All EarlyON Virtual Services must meet the following requirements:

- Incorporate the 3 mandatory core services: engaging parents/caregivers, supporting early learning and development, and making connections for families
- Ensure information on services provided is available to the public, including what virtual EarlyON Services are available; how children and families can access them; when services are offered; and how participants can provide suggestions and feedback.
- Ensure programs are facilitated by competent and knowledgeable staff
- Are designed with a family-centred approach that is based on the principles of HDLH?
- Are planned so that each session has a clear goal for the group
- Are tailored to the needs of the community
- Are designed to encourage the parent/caregiver and child's active participation. Technology is used in a way that is playful and supports creativity, exploration, pretend play, fine and gross motor play, and outdoor activities
- Complement and align with programming that can be accessed in-person

When planning for virtual services, staff should factor in adequate time for planning, setup, drop-off, and/or deliveries; follow-up; and data collection.

Planning in virtual services includes:

- Researching/creating original content
- Preparation
- Curating content, which is compiling and presenting contents using existing information.

When providing Virtual Services, EarlyON Service Providers should adhere to the following best practices:

Conduct

- Content pertaining to sensitive agency information should not be shared, this includes information that is financial, operational and legal in nature, as well as any information that pertains to program participants.
- Principles of integrity, professionalism, and impartiality should be observed by staff when posting online. Dishonorable content such as racial, ethnic, sexual, religious, and physical disability slurs must not be used. Act in ways that are respectful of the dimensions of diversity.
- Maintain privacy and respect for staff and participants by setting norms, rules of participation, and limiting visual distractions and settings that could reveal personal information. If there is an intention to record the event, an EarlyON service provider must seek the participants informed consent.
- Maintain professional boundaries in your role as an EarlyON centre staff.
- Use the parameters and considerations for each of the platforms used.
- When possible, engage families prior to delivering online programming to understand what they are interested in receiving through online platforms.
- Respond respectfully to user comments, both positive and negative.
- Own and amplify the EarlyON brand's identity and message consistently across platforms.

Content & Materials

- Use content with credible sources that follow best practices for meeting the developing needs of children and the needs of parents and caregivers. Give credit to the sources used by mentioning the creator's handle and citing sources.
- Online, virtual programs differ from traditional in-person interaction because it is harder to stay focused online. Therefore, you should keep programs/sessions shorter and break up into manageable pieces. For instance, offer a 30-minute program instead of a full hour, or limiting the size of the group to promote quality of programs and interactions and ensuring you are meeting the needs of all families participating.
- Use practices and content that foster engagement, relationship building, interaction, are process oriented and aligned with How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years (HDLH).
- Use props that parents and caregivers can access easily at home and do not require special materials to be purchased.
- When in a group session, set participation rules with the group at the start of the session noting that participants are not allowed to record the session.
- Edit content to ensure an uncluttered presentation, and that it is free of grammatical and spelling errors and uses plain language to communicate a main message.
- It is tempting to post* many times daily when using online platforms. However, social media etiquette tells us that fewer high-quality posts are preferred to many posts of lower quality. For more information on social media etiquette, visit https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-etiquette-rules-for- business/. *Posts are different than live/interactive events.

Guidelines & Standards for Facebook Pages

Facebook is one of the main social media platforms available to help EarlyON providers connect with their families. A Facebook Page allows organizations to easily create and share posts with their families while also providing more details on the organization's mission, important contact information, hours of operation and location. When creating a Facebook Page for an EarlyON Centre, it is important to distinguish between a Profile, Page and Group on Facebook as these commonly get confused when organizations

decide to start an account on Facebook. The following definitions will be used to establish the difference between a Profile, Page and Group:

A **profile** is a place on Facebook where you can share information about yourself, such as your interests, photos, videos, current city and hometown. Profiles are meant for personal use.

Pages are places on Facebook where artists, public figures, businesses, brands, organizations and non-profits can connect with their fans or customers. When someone likes or follows a Page on Facebook, they can start seeing updates from that Page in their News Feed.

Groups are a place to communicate about shared interests with certain people. You can create a group for anything — your family reunion, your after-work sports team, your book club — and customize the group's privacy settings depending on who you want to be able to join and see the group.

The main difference between a Page and a Group is that Pages are maintained and updated by the administrators while Groups allow any group member to post on the news feed. Unlike Groups, Pages focus only on the organization's content and allow posts to be shared under the organization's name, not a personal profile. For this reason, EarlyON Centres must create a Facebook Page to ensure professionalism and protect staff's personal Facebook Profiles. In the rare case that an EarlyON Centre has already created a Group instead of a Page and does not want to lose their data, they can link a Group to an existing business Page and post to the group under the Page's name. They must also change the group's posting permissions to "Only administrators can post to the group".

Another important reason EarlyON Centres are required to create a Facebook Page instead of a Profile or Group is the availability of analytics. Pages have an "Insights" option, which allows Admins to view data on their page and specific posts such as number of likes, engagement and reach. These numbers can be used to see what kind of posts are most popular with EarlyON families, thus helping with program planning. Children's Services requires EarlyON Centres to report this data. Please refer to the Virtual Services Monthly Data Reporting section for more details.

The same guidelines and standards apply to any social media platform (e.g. Instagram, Twitter, etc.).

Creating a Facebook Page

In order to create a Facebook page, someone with a personal Facebook Profile must create it. This person will then become an "Admin" and be able to manage all aspects of the page such as publishing posts and sending Messenger messages as the page and viewing Insights. Admins are allowed to assign page roles, which have varying permission levels, to other people granted they have a personal Facebook page. However, it is recommended that the number of people with access to the Facebook page is limited to only those who are in charge of handling the page. For tips on how to setup a Facebook Page, click here.

Program Calendars

EarlyON service providers who offer live interactive or recorded programs online should add them to their monthly program calendars to make it easier for families to know what virtual program options are available during the month. If pop-up virtual programs are being offered due to inclement weather cancellations, notice should be provided to families via social media posts and/or email.

EarlyON Service Provider Legal Liability & Risk

It is the responsibility of EarlyON service providers to maintain all platforms used to provide Virtual Services. EarlyON service providers must adhere to the following practices to limit the liability and risk of providing Virtual Services:

- Ensure adherence to the 'Terms of Use' of websites used as links and resources.

- Proper copyright and reference laws must be observed when posting online. Copyrighted works are legally protected. Ensure that copyrighted works are not placed online without the written or other explicit permission from the author/creator or authorized holder. Placing copyrighted works online without proper permission could have legal consequences.

EarlyON Virtual Services **cannot**:

- Read copyrighted books and sing copyrighted songs where they are posted online (live or recorded) without the permission of the authorized holder.

- Provide an out loud rendition of a book or song from memory where it is posted online (live or recorded) without the permission of the authorized holder.

- Post an author's own reading of their book or artist performance of their own song using the author's/artist's original content reference on Instagram. Instagram does not have a repost feature, therefore a third-party app must be used to repost, and use of a third-party app for reposting is illegal. This infringement also applies to Facebook where users are not allowed to post content available from other sources for which permission was not granted.

EarlyON Virtual Services **can**:

- Read books and sing songs that are copyrighted in a closed group or locked meeting. Closed groups and locked meetings protect the privacy of group members' posts (see Appendix A for more information on closed groups and locked meetings).

- Set participation rules with the group at the start of the session noting that participants are not allowed to record the session. At the start of each book note the author, illustrator and publisher. At the start of each song note the name of song and artist. If you will be singing multiple songs consecutively, note the names and artists at the start. A private YouTube video can also be used for this purpose when the video is shared with a private program and removed when the program ends. See Appendix A for the limitations of private videos.

- Remove any previously recorded copyrighted books and songs, for which permission has not been granted or which do not recognize/acknowledge the author, publisher, illustrator and any other parameters detailed in the permission granted for using the work.

- Use books and songs that are in the public domain and those where permission has been granted by the authorized holder. The term public domain refers to

materials that are not protected by intellectual property laws such as copyright, trademark, or patent laws. The public owns these works, and anyone can use public domain work without obtaining permission.

- Retweet an author's own reading of their book or artist performance of their own song using the author's/artist's original content reference on Twitter. When using Facebook, users can reshare the content originally posted by the author/artist on Facebook.

- Follow the terms of use that are stipulated for any copyrighted works.

- Use books for which permission has been granted.

- Act quickly if a security breach occurs and follow the Serious Occurrence Requirements for EarlyON Providers.

Visual Identity

When using Virtual Services for EarlyON centres, all messages must adhere to the Visual Identity Guidelines that contains information on the logo, brand assets and application.

EarlyON service providers who use social media platforms are encouraged to use the EarlyON logo as the header image for their profiles. Alternatively, the EarlyON logo can be used on each post. In all cases, the Visual Identity Guidelines must be followed. Examples of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter formats are seen below.
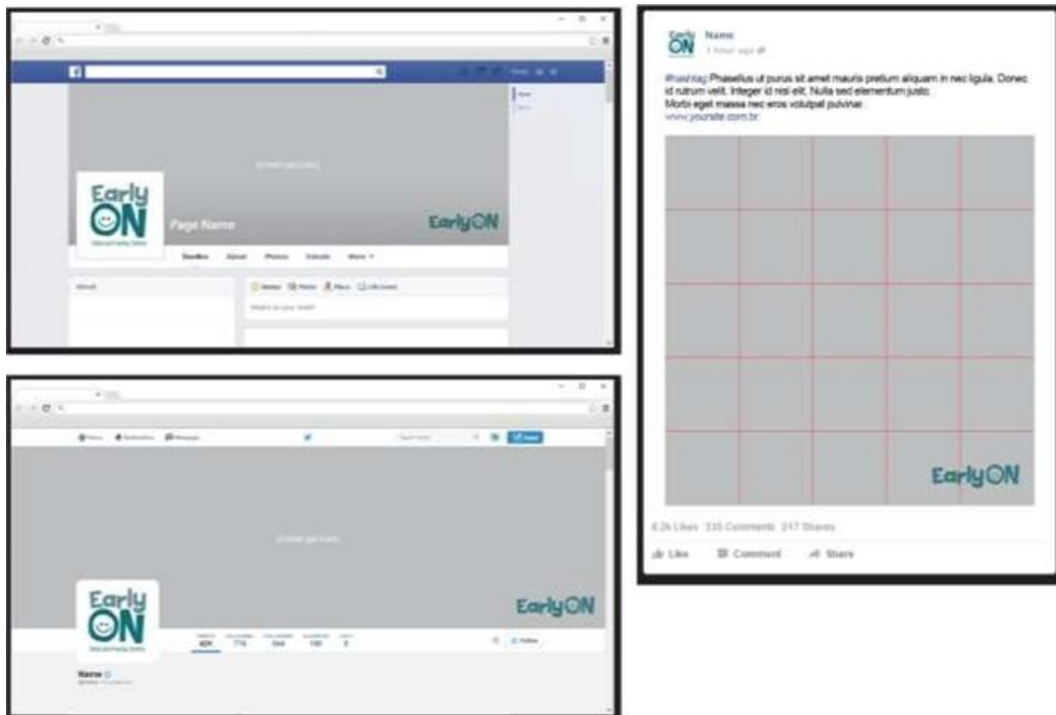
Reporting

It is important to capture data related to Virtual Services for EarlyON centres, therefore EarlyON service providers are asked to record and report virtual service data monthly.

Data for all registered virtual services will be captured using the Event Registration and Attendance Manager (ERAM) system. For details on how to capture data in ERAM, please see ERAM Provider Manual. Please ensure that all data is entered into ERAM by the 15th of each month for the month prior (e.g. by January 15, 2025 for December 2024 data).

Contact Us

If you have questions related to Virtual Services in EarlyON centres, please direct your inquiry to data@dnssab.ca.

Appendix A: Key Definitions

A **website** is a location connected to the Internet that maintains one or more webpages.

Social media is a web communication tool that can be used to build awareness of EarlyON programs and support community connections. Social media includes web-based and mobile technologies used to turn communication into interactive dialogue. Social media tools include Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Posts and tweets are terms used, for the information uploaded or shared on the social media platform.

A **post** is a piece of writing, image, or other item of content published online, typically on a blog or social media website. A **tweet** is a message sent on the Twitter platform that can contain links, photographs, GIFS (animated image) or videos; text tweets are limited to 280 characters.

For a definition of terms used in social media platforms, see the glossary and visit https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-glossary-definitions/.

Telephone services are traditional landline, mobile phones, and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP: a technology that makes phone calls possible from any internet-connected device with a microphone and speakers).

Web-based voice and video conferencing platforms are cloud-based video conferencing services that allows you to virtually meet with others such as Skype, Facetime, Zoom, WhatsApp, GoToMeeting, Webex, etc.

Electronic mail (Email) is a message that may contain text, files, images, or other attachments that is distributed by electronic means from one user to one or more recipients via a network.

Marketing/Organization platforms are business solutions used to connect with program participants through several online marketing functions as an integrated package such as email, electronic postcards, websites, social media, mobile and web apps, and automations. Examples of marketing platforms include Mailchimp, SharpSpring, HubSpot, Hootsuite, Constant Contact, etc.

Appendix B: Tips on Using Virtual Platforms

Access Facebook Analytics. You can access Facebook Analytics from the web or via the Facebook Analytics mobile app. Some features differ between the Facebook Analytics mobile app and Facebook Analytics on the web. For instructions on how to access Facebook analytics, visit this link.

Twitter Analytics. Twitter analytics allow you to measure and boost your impact with dashboards. You have access to audience analysis and tweet activity. You can track metrics such as top tweet, new followers, top followers, top mention, engagement, reach, link clicks etc. To learn more about Twitter analytics, visit this link.

Blocking people. This feature allows you to block a user. When you block a user, they are not notified. For instructions on how to block a user, visit this link.

Breakout rooms. Allow you to split your Zoom meeting in up to 50 separate sessions. The meeting host can choose to split the participants of the meeting into these separate sessions automatically or manually and can switch between sessions at any time. For information on how to create and manage breakout rooms, visit this link.

Create recurring meetings. Allows you to set the call settings you want once and have them be in there every time you plan to meet, and you can join calls using the same URL each time. For instructions on how to create recurring meetings, visit this link.

Direct Message. You can start a non-public conversation or create a group conversation with anyone who follows you. For instructions on direct messaging, visit this link.

Facebook is a social networking website where users can post comments, share photographs and post links to news or other interesting content on the web, chat live, and watch short-form video. Shared content can be made publicly accessible, or it can be shared only among a select group of people, or with a single person. Many helpful tips and video tutorials on the various feature of Facebook can be accessed by visiting https://www.facebook.com/.

Facebook Live. This feature uses the camera on a computer or mobile device to broadcast real-time video to Facebook. Live broadcasters can decide who on Facebook can see their video and use this content to engage their audience during the moments and events that are important to them. For instructions and tips on using Facebook Live, visit this link and this link.

Hashtags are keyword phrases, spelled out without spaces, with a pound sign (#) in front of it (E.g., #EarlyON). They are mainly used to denote specific topics of conversation. They are used to increase engagement, build your brand, and find your audience. Hashtags that spread quickly and get used by a lot of different users begin to trend. Whenever there is a trending topic or hashtag within your sector's circle on social media, take note of that (E.g., #newmom). You can jump on that hashtag in order to increase your brand awareness too. Hashtags are used on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Instagram is a free photo and video sharing app that allows you to upload photos and videos and share them with your followers. For helpful tips and video tutorials on using Instagram, visit this link.

Insights. This helps you learn more about your followers and the people interacting with your business on Instagram. For example, you'll find insights such as gender, age range and location. You can also see which posts and stories your audience sees and engages with the most. Insights and metrics about your account include paid activity as well. Reach, accounts reached, impressions, and impressions by day reflect both paid and organic activity. For more on Instagram Insights, visit this link.

Private Facebook Groups. To protect the privacy of group members' posts, discussions, photos, or files, you can change your Facebook group from public to private. This can be done both when creating a new group, or by changing the privacy settings of an old group. For instructions on how to create public or private groups, visit this link.

Record meetings. Participant permission is needed. The meeting host enables recordings in settings (for paid subscription). For instructions on how to record meeting, visit https://zoom.us/resources.

Safety. Increasing safety when using social media is paramount for all users. To see instructions on how to increase your safety while using Instagram, visit this link.

Social media image sizes. Having the optimal image size for each social media platform ensures that your images look their best. The most recent social media image dimensions, as of 2020 for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and other platforms can be found by visiting this link.

Stories. Instagram stories differ from regular Instagram posts because they come in a "slideshow" format. They're only live for 24 hours, but Stories can be saved to any of your devices and reused at a later point. Stories are displayed at the top of follower timelines where users already look daily. For more information on Instagram Stories, visit this link.

Tagging friends in your photos or in your posts is easy. If you want to list them in a post, such as a status update saying that you had a great time with them at an event or you are about to meet them for a community event. For instruction on how to tag users, visit this link.

Teasers. These posts are a simple way to talk about your activity or program and increase excitement and direct users to your website or interactive group activity.

Twitter is a 'microblogging' system that allows you to send and receive short posts called tweets. Tweets can be up to 280 characters long and can include links to relevant websites and resources. Twitter users follow other users. If you follow someone you can see their tweets in your twitter 'timeline'. For more information on Twitter, visit https://twitter.com/?lang=en.

Unfollow and Blocking. People unfollow other accounts when they no longer wish to see that account's Tweets in their home timeline. You can still view them on an as-needed basis by visiting their profile, unless their Tweets are protected. Block is a feature that helps you control how you interact with other accounts on Twitter. This feature helps users in restricting specific accounts from contacting them, seeing their Tweets, and following them. For instructions to unfollow and block users, visit this link.

Unfollowing, Removing and Blocking Friends. Facebook has a handy option that allows you to "unfollow" friends to stop seeing their posts in your News Feed without

having to remove them as a friend (a.k.a. "unfriending" them). When you unfollow or block someone, they are not notified about it. For instructions on unfollowing, removing and blocking users, visit this link.

YouTube is a video sharing service where users can watch, like, share, comment and upload their own videos. The video service can be accessed on PCs, laptops, tablets and via mobile phones.

Video categories. When videos are listed as **public**, they can be viewed by anyone in the world and appears in a search. When videos are **unlisted**, they can be viewed by those with whom the uploader shares the link and anyone with whom those people share the link, and as many times as it is reshared (no google account needed). If there is a complaint for inappropriate content, YouTube reviews the video and if they deem it as inappropriate, they will remove it within 24 hrs. Copyrighted material falls into inappropriate content. The video cannot be accessed when it is removed by YouTube or the uploader. Videos listed as **private** can be seen by those with whom the uploader shares the link (50 people max), but not by people who receive the link from a secondary source.

Viewers must have a google account to access the video. The video can not be accessed when it is removed by the uploader. For more information on public, unlisted and private videos, visit this link and this link.

Virtual backgrounds. Choose virtual backgrounds or upload an image to customise your background. It's available for both iPhone and desktops. This feature can help to keep your actual environment private. For instructions on how to choose or upload virtual backgrounds, visit this link.

Zoom is a cloud-based video conferencing service you can use to virtually meet with others - either by video or audio-only or both, all while conducting live chats and screen sharing, it lets you record those sessions to view later. The user has many plans to choose from ranging from Zoom Free to Zoom Rooms, each plan allows various levels of features. The free version of Zoom allows unlimited number of meetings that are capped at 40 minutes in length, and meetings cannot be recorded.

To choose a plan, download Zoom and access many video tutorials, visit https://zoom.us/.

Zoom analytics. The dashboard shows you a real-time look at your Zoom meetings. You can find the dashboard by logging into your account, clicking Account Management, and then clicking Dashboard on the right side of the window. For more information on accessing Zoom analytics, visit this link.

When using online platforms do not say anything or add text to a chat window you would not want others to read, hear or that breaks your professional standards. To maintain privacy, do not share images or recordings with participant's names or faces.

Zoombombing. The practice of uninvited attendees breaking into and disrupting meetings, often broadcasting inappropriate materials and remarks. The following tips are suggested to limit Zoombombing:

- When you start a meeting, you get to invite people and send out a link that starts with looks like this: https://zoom.us/ followed by a long string of numbers, letters both capitalized and lower-case. A safer way to invite people is instead to jot down the meeting ID, which is noted in the middle, found at the top of the screen where you go to get the link, and the password, at the bottom right. Put those in an e-mail with a personal note, to make your guests feel a lot better about the security of this meeting. They can either go to http://www.zoom.us to log into the meeting or open the app. If sharing this link publicly, follow additional noted security practices.

- Adjust the screen share options by accessing the general Zoom settings app window. Select Advanced settings. There you instruct Zoom to only let the Host share the screen.

- Use waiting rooms that lets the host pre-screen the guests before the meeting starts for an extra layer of security. To get there, go to your master account settings, (under "My Account" at the top right of the main screen), click Settings, go to the Meetings tab and scroll all the way to the bottom, where you will find the Waiting Room options. Once clicked, this will be the default on all your meetings.

- Lock the meeting. When you lock a Zoom meeting that has already started, no new participants can join, even if they have the meeting ID and password. In the meeting, click Participants at the bottom of your Zoom window. In the Participants pop-up, click the button that says Lock Meeting.

- Create a webinar instead of a meeting. This is a presentation to a group that doesn't bring in participation, and thus, less likely to be hacked. It's only available with paid subscriptions.

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