



Family Time (Visitation):



Monitor's Guidelines for Supervised Family Time

BACKGROUND

- As a monitor, you play a vital role in helping build the relationships between children and their family of origin.
- Studies indicate that family time, (also known as visitation) between parents and children is the single best predictor of family reunification.
- Family time also reduces the amount of time children are in placement and is linked to healthier development, attachment, future relationships and mental health for foster children.
- Remember, family time is part of a continuum and that every case is individualized to meet the needs of each family.
- As the monitor, you provide support to the family while ensuring that the rules and guidelines of any supervised family time are followed.

UNLESS OTHERWISE ORDERED BY THE COURT, THE MONITOR SHOULD:

- Monitor conditions to ensure the safety and welfare of the child.
- Avoid taking sides with either party.
- Ensure that all contact between the child and the visiting party (which includes parents/legal guardians and other family members) is within the monitor's hearing and sight at all times, and that discussions are audible to the monitor.
- Speak in a language spoken by the child and the visiting party.
- Advise the visiting party of their options and whether they can have a translator present or a monitor who can navigate multiple languages, as necessary.



- Be mindful and respectful of the family's unique culture, traditions, customs and language. As the monitor, you should advise the family of the rules of communication prior to the start of family time and respectfully redirect the child and the visiting party if they begin speaking in a language you do not understand. Remember, family time is essential to family reunification; this factor should not be a reason to terminate or halt the session. You must balance this with the primary need to ensure interactions between the child and their family are appropriate.
- For a child who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ+), beware of rejecting behaviors (such as not using the child's preferred name or gender pronoun or not allowing the child to talk about their LGBTQ+ identity) during family time, as rejecting behaviors greatly increase the possibility of negative outcomes for LGBTQ+ children and youth.
- Ensure that the visiting party demonstrates affirming behavior toward the child and uses affirming language when addressing the child. This includes addressing the child by their chosen name and gender pronouns with which they identify.
- Redirect the visiting party if they make derogatory comments about parents/legal guardians, their family, caregiver, child or child's sibling.
- Redirect parents/legal guardians to discuss the court case or possible future outcomes with their social worker.
- The monitor nor the child should be used to gather information about the other parent/legal guardian or caregiver or to transmit documents, information or personal possessions.
- No family time is to occur while the visiting party appears to be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.
- Ensure that the parties follow all additional guidelines set forth by DCFS or the court (e.g., all visitors must be pre-approved).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS FOR SEXUAL ABUSE CASES

In cases where there are allegations of sexual abuse, in addition to the guidelines above, there are other special considerations, unless otherwise ordered by the court. However, each circumstance and case needs to be assessed individually when determining whether the following rules should apply. While child safety is always the priority, facilitating interactions to maintain, strengthen or repair the parent-child bond needs to be taken into account.

- No exchanging of gifts, money or cards.
- No photographing, audio taping or videotaping of the child.



- No physical contact with the child such as lap-sitting, hair-combing, stroking, hand-holding, prolonged hugging, wrestling, tickling, horse-playing, changing diapers or accompanying the child to the bathroom.
- No whispering, passing notes, hand signals or body signals.
- No supervised family time in the location where the alleged sexual abuse occurred.

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND OBLIGATIONS FOR ALL MONITORS

- Advise the parties before commencement of supervised family time that no confidential privilege exists.
- Report suspected child abuse or neglect to the DCFS Child Protection Hotline (1-800-540-4000) as provided by law, and inform the parties of the monitor's obligation to make such reports.
- Implement the guidelines as specified above.
- Suspend or terminate family time when appropriate according to the below section entitled, "Temporary Suspension or Termination of Supervised Family Time".

ADDITIONAL LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF PROFESSIONAL AND THERAPEUTIC MONITORS

In addition to the legal responsibilities and obligations required above, Professional and Therapeutic Monitors should:

- Prepare a written contract to be signed by the parties before commencement of the supervised family time. The contract should inform each party of the supervised family time guidelines.
- Review custody and family time orders relevant to the supervised family time.
- Implement an intake and screening procedure as listed on Procedural Guide 0400-504.00, Family Time.
- Comply with additional requirements as listed below under, "Additional Requirements for Professional and Therapeutic Monitors".

TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OR TERMINATION OF SUPERVISED FAMILY TIME

- Monitors should make every reasonable effort to provide safe family time for the child and the visiting party. However, if a monitor determines that the guidelines of family time have been violated, the child has become acutely distressed or the safety of the child or the monitor is at risk, family time may be temporarily interrupted, or terminated and rescheduled.
- Reasons to terminate family time, include, but are not limited to:
 - Spanking, hitting or threatening the child.
 - Emotionally, verbally, physically or sexually abusing the child.



- All interruptions or terminations of family time should be recorded in the case file.
- Monitors should advise both parties of the reason(s) for interruption of family time or termination.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL AND THERAPEUTIC MONITORS

Professional and Therapeutic Monitors should state the reasons for temporary suspension or termination of supervised family time in writing and provide the written statement to both parties, their attorneys, the attorney for the child and the court.

I understand my role and responsibility as a monitor and agree that I am willing and able to follow the instructions as described above.

Monitor's Signature _____ Date _____



Sample Talking Points for Monitors

SAMPLE INTRODUCTORY TALKING POINTS FOR MONITORS

- Hello, my name is _____ and I am here to monitor this important family time you have with your child(ren).
- My primary role is to make sure everyone is safe, including you, as well as your child(ren).
- I also want to do everything I can to ensure you have as meaningful and positive family time, as possible.
- If I see you or your child struggling, I may jump in to provide support.
- At the end of family time, if your child(ren) feels anxious, withdrawn, sad or confused, it may be because leaving you is difficult. It may be hard but it's a sign of healthy attachment. Feel free to comfort your child and remind them that you will see them again.
- After your time together, I will be here if you feel like sharing what went well or what you may wish to do differently next time.
- Also, if you would like to request a Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) at any time to discuss case issues, including family time, let your social worker know.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- A child's reactions to family time can be misunderstood. Typical behaviors and feelings should be understood and communicated to parents and caregivers, as they may be due to the following:
 - Feelings of loss and separation
 - Feeling conflicted in their loyalty
 - Feelings of lack of control
 - Confusion as to the reasons they cannot go home
 - Their inability to communicate their feelings
- Be prepared to answer difficult questions that the child may ask (i.e., "When can I go home? Why is this happening to me?"). Help parents answer their child's question in a positive, strength-based approach.
- It is critical to remain positive and strength-based when speaking to children about parents and refrain from making negative comments. Model compassion by treating parents with respect and kindness, and without judgement.



- Inquire about a child's or family's cultural and religious practices. Obtaining this information can be significant to promoting frequent contact, supporting reunification, and preserving the child's cultural and community connections.

Types of Family Time

From least to most restrictive

