



## Family Time (Visitation):



# Tips for Children's Services Social Workers

- One of the most important responsibilities of a CSW is to facilitate family time (also known as visitation) for families, as bonding between children and their parents is the cornerstone to healthy and safe families.
- Family time is an opportunity for parents to develop, strengthen, and maintain connection with their children and demonstrate their parental capacities.
- Studies indicate that family time 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, subsequent relationships, and mental health for foster children.
- Remember, family time is part of a continuum and that every plan is individualized to meet the needs of each family.

## Types of Family Time

From least to most restrictive

- **Unmonitored:**
  - A safety assessment indicates the parent does not require a monitor
  - Family has regular family time alone
- **Observed:**
  - "Drop-in" supervision throughout family time and/or brief supervision at the beginning or end
- **Monitored:**
  - Monitor is present for the entire duration of family time
- **Therapeutic:**
  - A mental health clinician facilitates family time
  - Child's needs are addressed within the context of the family time



## GENERAL OVERVIEW

- The type of family time and frequency is based on safety factors, and is not a reward for completing case plan activities nor can it be taken away as punishment for not completing activities.
- Discuss with the parent and the resource family, the importance of family time and its purpose.
- Involve the parent in the planning of family time and its logistics. Work with the parent and resource family to schedule family time around the child's schedule, if possible (e.g., not during school hours, late at night or during nap time).
- Review the family time/visitation guidelines, and any case-specific limitations you have discussed with your supervisor, with the parent, such as:
  - Topics that may be off limits, for example, case issues
  - Approved people that can visit with the parent, if applicable
  - Ability to share gifts, pictures, food
  - For infants and toddlers, parameters on changing diapers based on the nature of the allegation
- If family time is monitored, discuss with the parent what must occur for family time to be liberalized, such as:
  - Increase of protective capacities (e.g., demonstrates impulse control, prioritizes child's needs over their own, and is aware of the child's capabilities, needs and limitations)
  - Demonstration of appropriate parenting skills
  - Demonstration of bonding and attachment
  - Ability to maintain the child's safety and meet their needs
- It is imperative that you encourage and facilitate communication between the parent and resource family, as relationships between these parties can be complex and need to be discussed and attended to so the child can be nurtured by both their parent and their resource family.
- Remind the resource family that it is critical to remain positive and strength-based when speaking to the child about their parent and that they must refrain from making negative comments.
- Inquire about the child's or family's cultural and religious practices. This information can promote frequent contact, support reunification, and preserve the child's cultural and community connections. It can also help in planning family time activities.
- Family time should be discussed during Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM), especially during the initial one, as it is the perfect venue to engage different parties to address questions or concerns. Ideally, the resource family should be part of these discussions as they play an integral part in supporting the family time plan.
- For a child who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ+), it is important to beware of rejecting behaviors from the parent (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 interactions,



as these rejecting behaviors greatly increase the possibility of negative outcomes for children and youth. Model affirming behavior and language, and encourage the parent to do the same. Some parents may need more time to process and adjust, whereas others may find that it comes naturally.

- It is important to be mindful and respectful of the family's culture, including, but not limited to their native language. Families may have different traditions, customs, and ways of interacting from yours, therefore it is critical that no conclusions or assumptions be made based on those differences—sometimes different is only different. If family time is supervised, and the parent and child communicate in a language you do not understand and you are the monitor, respectfully redirect them to speak in a language understood by all parties. This factor is not a reason to stop, cancel or reschedule family time.
- It is highly recommended to discuss all these recommendations in the CFT process.

## FAMILY-FRIENDLY SETTINGS

- When appropriate and feasible, family time should take place in home settings, such as the resource family's or the parents' home, or other family-friendly setting (for example, libraries or parks), rather than at a DCFS office.
- Encourage the parent to participate in activities where they can demonstrate responsibility such as shopping, medical appointments, school, extra-curricular/religious activities, or bedtime routines.
- When face-to-face contact is not possible, help the resource family and parent plan for other forms of contact, such as, phone calls, Skype, FaceTime, or email, if allowable.

## BEFORE FAMILY TIME

- Prepare the parent for family time by sharing ideas of how to connect with the child, such as:
  - Activities to do during family time, for example, reading, playing board games, helping with homework, or bringing a toy that elicits positive memories
  - Tips on comforting the child if they get become upset, as a child's confusion or sorrow from being separated from their parent may be displayed as anger or other behaviors
  - Inquire about prior ways parents have connected with their children, and encourage these activities when appropriate
- Remind the resource parent that they can support family time by:
  - Providing a healthy snack and transitional object for the child
  - Having the child share the work they are doing at school with the parent
  - Providing books, games or art supplies
  - Exhibiting a positive attitude toward family time
- Remind the resource family that a child can be affected by knowing that family time with their parent is approaching. Below are some of the symptoms they might see before family time:



- Nightmares and sleep disturbances
  - Unrealistic expectations about how family time will go
  - Anxiety
- Prepare the child for family time by sharing realistic expectations about who will be present, the duration, location, or activities that may or may not take place.

## DURING FAMILY TIME

### The monitor will:

- Model positive parenting behavior and healthy parent-child interactions.
- Reinforce the parent's confidence in parenting skills when they show positive change.

## AFTER FAMILY TIME

- Remind the resource family that a child's negative behavior may indicate *healthy attachment* and distress over separation—though they can be difficult to cope with, they may not be an indication that family time is harmful.
- Remind the monitor to assist the child in separating at the end of family time and validating their feelings.

## CANCELED FAMILY TIME

- Simply explain that family time needed to be rescheduled by one of the parties. When telling the child about a canceled family time do not place blame.
- Discuss the reason for the cancellation with the parent and address the barriers.