



## Family Time (Visitation):



# Tips for Parents

- The removal of your child from your care is a very stressful experience for both you and your child. You may feel frustrated, anxious, and worried. That is why it is critical that you continue to build your relationship with your child and be involved in their lives while you work towards reunification.
- 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, subsequent 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.

### GENERAL

- Do your best to remain positive and strength-based when talking to your child—they need you to be strong.
- Try to establish a connection with your child's resource family, so you can work together and ease the transition between families. It is important to share information about your child, such as, daily routines, favorite toys, food preferences, and medical issues.
- If your child asks when they can come home with you, it is important not to make promises, but assure them that you love them and are working on their return.
- Share your family's cultural and religious practices with your social worker and your child's resource family. This information can promote frequent contact, support reunification and preserve your family's cultural and community connections.
- Remember that you can request a Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) at any time to discuss case issues such as family time. The CFTM is a great place to address questions or concerns regarding the progress of family time.
- Provide your social worker with contact information of family members and friends who can support you and your child during family time, such as serving as monitors.
- Be open to receiving feedback, suggestions, and role modeling from the monitor.



- For children who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ+), it is important to support them and accept their identity with affirming behavior and language.

## FAMILY-FRIENDLY SETTINGS

- When appropriate and feasible, try to have your family time in a home setting or a family-friendly one (such as libraries or parks).
- Ask your social worker about participating in activities where you can demonstrate responsibility such as shopping, medical appointments, school, extra-curricular/religious activities and bedtime routines.
- When face-to-face contact is not possible, plan with DCFS on to stay connected with your child through phone calls or video conferencing.

## BEFORE FAMILY TIME

- Ask your child what they would like to do or have you bring to family time (such as board games, books, crafts, or homework for you to help them with) and try to plan the activity. If this is not realistic, work with your child to come up with a more practical plan.
- If possible, schedule family time around your child's schedule (i.e., not during school hours, late at night or during nap time).

## DURING FAMILY TIME

- It is not uncommon for a child to act out during family time. They may feel sad, angry or confused about being separated and then having time together. Comfort your child and validate their feelings.
- Practice your parenting skills, especially any new skills you have learned.
- Meet your child's needs and keep them safe.
- Bring a healthy snack to share, if allowable.

## AFTER FAMILY TIME

- A child's negative behavior may indicate *healthy attachment* and distress over separation—though it can be difficult to cope with, it may not be an indication that family time is harmful.
- Help your child separate at the end of family time by explaining that you understand it can be difficult to leave you, but you will see them again soon. If possible, share the specific date when you will see each other again.



- Although it is important for you to express your emotions with peers, try not to get emotional in front of your child, as this may make cause them to feel anxious or sad.

## CANCELED FAMILY TIME

- Canceled family time can be disappointing and difficult for a child.
- If you are not able to attend family time, reschedule in advance, and let your child know the cancellation did not have to do anything with them. If family time is canceled by another party, do not blame anyone.