



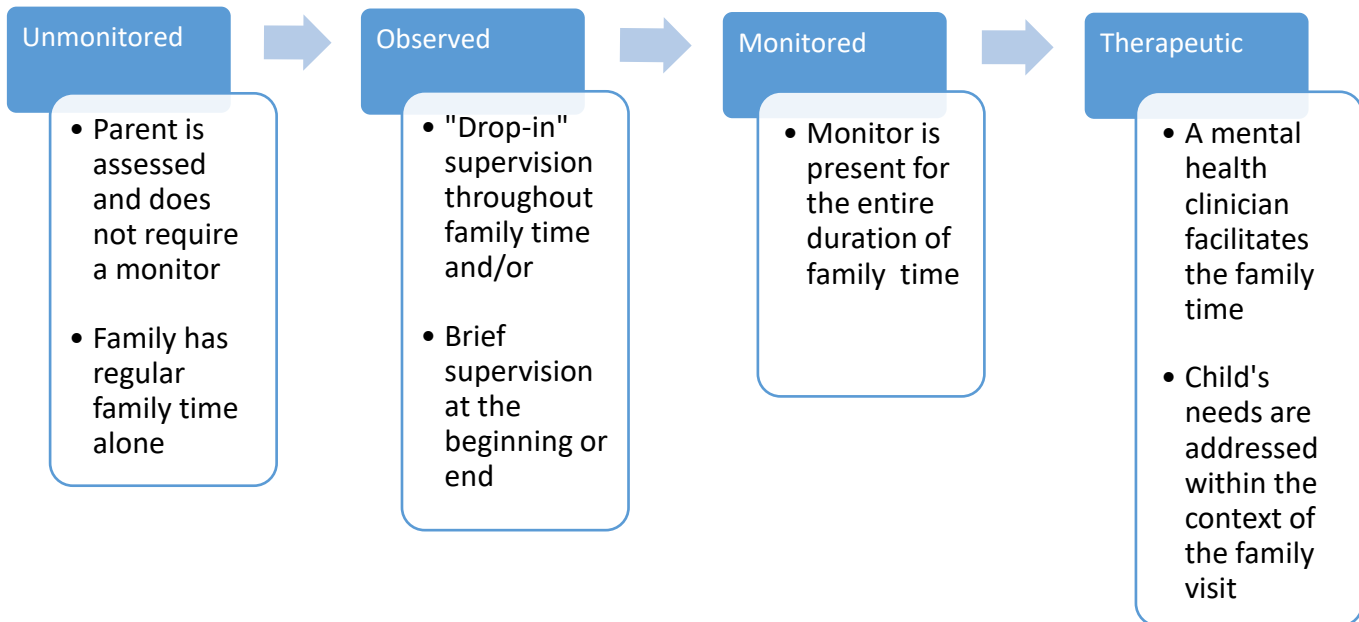
## Family Time (Visitation):



# Tips for Resource Parents

- As a resource family (relative caregiver, non-related extended family member caregiver or foster parent), you can play a vital role in helping build the relationships between children in your care 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, 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.

### Types of Family Time From least to most restrictive





## GENERAL

- Relationships between resource families and parents can be complex. Some have strong relationships, while others may ~~have harbor~~ negative feelings (frustration, guilt, resentment, anger, mistrust) toward one another. Logistical challenges can often exacerbate these feelings; however, it is extremely important that you try to foster a positive relationship for the well-being of the child.
- It is critical to remain positive and strength-based when speaking to children about parents and you must refrain from making negative comments. Model compassion by treating parents with respect and kindness, and without judgment.
- 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.
- Remember, you are part of the Child and Family Team, and 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 venue to address questions or concerns regarding the progress of family time.
- For a child who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ+), it is important to 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 interactions, as these rejecting behaviors greatly increase the possibility of negative outcomes for children and youth. Model affirming behavior and language, and encourage the parents 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 parents and child(ren) 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.

## FAMILY-FRIENDLY SETTINGS

- When appropriate and feasible, try to have family time take place in your home, the parents' home or other family-friendly setting (such as libraries or parks), rather than at a DCFS office.
- Consider activities where parents can demonstrate responsibility such as shopping, medical appointments, school, extra-curricular/religious activities or bedtime routines.
- When face-to-face contact is not possible, plan with DCFS on how to accommodate with phone calls, Skype, FaceTime or email, if appropriate.



## BEFORE FAMILY TIME

- A child can be affected by knowing that family time with their parents is approaching. Here are some of the symptoms you might see before family time:
  - Nightmares and sleep disturbances
  - Unrealistic expectations about how family time will go
  - Anxiety
- Keep the child informed of planned family time.
- Ask the child what they would like to do or bring to family time (such as toys, books or homework) and try to arrange the activity. If it is not realistic, work with them to come up with a more practical plan.
- 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.
- Have some special before family time rituals to comfort the child, such as arranging special clothes or fixing the child's hair in a particular way.
- Comfort the child as they transition into family time.
- If possible, work with the parents to schedule family time around the child's schedule (i.e., not during school hours, late at night or during nap time), and transport the child to and from family time. Be as flexible as possible so that the child is able to have the maximum amount of contact.

## 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.
- Model positive parenting behavior and healthy parent-child interactions.
- Share information and photos/videos with parents about the child's daily life, schedule and activities.
- Reinforce the parent's confidence in parenting skills when they show positive change.
- Provide a healthy snack and transitional object for the child.
- For school age children, have the child bring homework to family time so parents can help them or have the child share their school work.



- Bring books, games or basic art supplies. The child can create artwork for their parents.

## AFTER FAMILY TIME

- 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.
- Family time may cause a variety of feelings and behaviors such as:
  - Nightmares and sleep disturbances
  - Crying, sometimes excessively
  - Withdrawal or ambivalence
  - Anger or anxiety
  - Sadness or disappointment
  - Acting out (stomping feet, slamming doors, yelling, etc.)
- Assist the child in separating at the end of family time, explaining that you understand it can be difficult to leave their parents.
- Establish a routine when the child returns from family time, such as, unpacking back-pack, having a snack or reading a book.
- After family time, whether it goes well or not, be especially welcoming to the child and spend additional time nurturing them and showing extra attention—ask how family time went and listen with your undivided attention.
- If possible, reassure the child that there will be a subsequent family time and when.
- Reserve negative feelings and discuss concerns about family time arrangements with DCFS, not the child or parents.

## CANCELED FAMILY TIME

- Canceled family time can be disappointing and difficult for a child.
- When telling the child about a canceled family time, do not place blame. Simply explain that family time needed to be rescheduled by one of the parties.
- Provide additional comforting when family time is canceled, assuring the child that they are not the reason family time was canceled, they did not do anything wrong and they are still loved.
- If possible, try to do any activities with the child that may have been planned with the parents.



## RESOURCES

These tips were compiled from a variety of resources. You can find the full tips here:

- Fostering Perspectives:  
[https://fosteringperspectives.org/fp\\_vol5no2/involved\\_fparents\\_crucial\\_visits.htm](https://fosteringperspectives.org/fp_vol5no2/involved_fparents_crucial_visits.htm)
- American Academy of Pediatrics:  
[www.aap.org/en-us/Documents/hfca\\_guidance\\_foster\\_kinship\\_caregivers.pdf](http://www.aap.org/en-us/Documents/hfca_guidance_foster_kinship_caregivers.pdf)  
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/adoption-and-foster-care/Pages/Tips-for-Helping-Children-and-Teens-Before-and-After-Visitation.aspx>
- Texas State:  
[https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/CPS/Resource\\_Guides/Visitation\\_Best\\_Practice\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/CPS/Resource_Guides/Visitation_Best_Practice_Guide.pdf)
- LA County LGBTQ+ Youth Resources:  
[http://file.mylacounty.gov/SDSIntra/dcfs/docs/1065698\\_LACountyResources.pdf](http://file.mylacounty.gov/SDSIntra/dcfs/docs/1065698_LACountyResources.pdf)