

# Familyconnect

## *Putting the pieces of family visits together*



### A guide for parents

*You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.*

*You must do the thing which you think you cannot do.*

—ELEANOR ROOSEVELT



### *Importance of family visits....*

**Your children need to see you. You need to see your children.** While your children are in foster care, family visits are one of the best ways for you to show and tell them you love and miss them while you are living apart. The time and place of family visits will be scheduled by your social worker as soon as possible so you can stay connected as a family. This guide will help you understand the purpose and process of family visitation or “family time” so you can keep building strong connections with your children.

**Whatever your personal story, living away from one another is difficult for children AND parents.** Having others plan when and where you get to see your children is difficult, often making parents angry and uncomfortable. You are not alone. This guide is based on the stories from interviews of children in foster care and their parents... people who have been where you are—stories about what helped their families while they were living apart. The information in this guide may help and encourage you as your family works toward reunification.

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## Introduction

FIVE pieces that can help families make the best of their time together based on our interviews:

**Emotion**

**Communication**

**Preparation**

**Connection**

**Transition**

*Every family is unique. The information in this guide is meant to provide a base from which to build but may not apply to every child and family.*

*With respect for all families, we try to use the term “family time” rather than “visitation” whenever possible throughout this guide. Feel free to adapt some of the materials so that it can be applied to your individual circumstances.*

### Birth Parents Speak Out:

*“I just need that quality time to soak up my child. I mean I literally some-times, I get real quiet and just sit there and touch his hair and just like, I gotta squeeze a whole week into an hour.”*

# Preparation

Children are usually confused about everything that is happening when they are separated from family members. It is important to understand how your kids might be feeling and think ahead about what they might need before you spend time together. Understanding where and when you will see your children, what's expected, planning activities, bringing things that are special to your child, knowing how you will answer difficult questions, ending your time together positively and talking with foster parent are a few ways you can make family time a better experience for you and your children.

Sometimes children act different or try to get extra attention from their parent by acting younger than their age, being silly, withdrawn or aggressive. Sometimes parents blame the foster parents for changes they see in their child's behavior but some changes in behavior are normal when children are separated from family.

Planning all these pieces ahead of time can help you make the most of your time together...



## Preparation CHECK

### What is expected of me during visits is..

- That I show up and spend time with my kids
- That I am sober or following my case plan
- That I interact with my kids positively
- That I learn to discipline them safely
- That I build a stronger relationship with my kids

### When I have appointments or something I need to do I generally....

- Get there early
- Get there late
- Get there just in the nick of time
- Am usually rushing around and getting stressed
- Forget or something happens so I can't get there

### When thinking about spending time with my children with someone else watching us I....

- Feel upset and embarrassed
- Will just do my best to have a good time
- Wonder what they will be looking for...
- Think it's unfair
- Appreciate any help I can get for my kids

### What I want most for my children during our family time is for them to...

- Have fun
- Know that I love them
- Understand what is happening
- Spend time being a family
- Feel less upset about being away from me

### When I see my child's foster parent at a visit, I...

- Hope to talk with them about how my child is doing
- Want to have a good relationship with them
- Feel jealous that they are caring for my child and worried that they are not taking good care of them
- Am worried that they are trying to replace me or are judging me

## Things to Consider in preparing yourself and your children for family time

### Know what is expected of you during your family visits.

Are there things you should or should not talk about with your children? Are there specific goals you are being asked to work on with your children?

### Plan your transportation so you can get to your family visit on time.

Transportation is one of the biggest barriers parents report in getting to see their children. Plan ahead, so your child is not left wondering why you did not come to see them.

### Bring pictures or other things that are special to your child.

Sometimes children worry about the things that were left behind while they are living in foster care. Having a picture of their family, a special blanket, a stuffed animal, or their favorite toy, can remind them that their family is still their family. Bring gifts for birthdays and holidays you celebrate at home but not to every visit.

### Plan an activity to do together.

Your family time is a great opportunity for you to play, talk and connect with your child. Think about what you enjoy doing together and bring the things you need or ask someone what is available for you to do at your visiting place. Planning ahead shows your child how excited you are to spend time together.

*Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other one thing.*

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

### Think about how you might handle your feelings of meeting or talking with your child's foster parent.

Seeing your child come and go with another caring adult is hard. Your child might call their foster parent "mom" but remember YOU are still their parent. Children always need caring adults in their life, other than their parent. If you find that you are having a lot of conflict with a foster parent, talk with someone who can help so your child will not feel stuck in the middle.

### Have answers prepared for your child's tough questions.

Why is this happening? When can I come home? Why can't I live with you? Why don't you love me? Trying to answer these questions honestly will help your child feel less anxious. If you are struggling to find answers, ask your visit supervisor, counselor or social worker to help you get started. Oftentimes families address some of these questions in therapy as well.

### Saying goodbye to your children will be difficult.

No one is ever quite prepared for the difficulty of saying goodbye to his/her children after your time together. However, the ending is what your child will remember until they see you next...Keep it positive and know ahead of time what you will say. Know how you will manage your own emotions as well as your children's feelings.

### Birth Parents Speak Out:

*"He would ask me, "mommy why can't you come with me to (FPs) or why can't I go to your house?" I would say, mommy has to get better right now, mommy hasn't been feeling good so you know, you need to stay with (FP) until mommy gets better. It broke my heart to say that, like I was giving in, but it made him feel better about being away from me because I said that."*