

Preparing For Family Interaction

Preparing the Primary Family for Visits

- Clarify what the worker or foster caregiver roles will be during visits (assessing interactions, modeling parenting skills, providing support, transportation only, etc.).
- Update the parent on what has been happening with the child since the last contact (school progress, achievements, medical issues, behavior issues, foster family events, etc.).
- Advise parents what behaviors or reactions to expect from the child.
- Assist and expect parents to plan visits, including setting parameters on who is included in visits.
- Allow parents to explore their own feelings of excitement, apprehension or discomfort.

Preparing Children for Visits

- Give the child all the information available about the visit regarding where it will occur, who will and won't be there and how long it will last.
- Give as many details as possible: where and when they will eat lunch; who they will see; whether there will be toys to play with or other things to do.
- Use references to time that are meaningful to them: "You will be there on the day you don't go to school," or "You will be back in time to watch 'Sesame Street'".
- Address any concerns the child may have about personal safety: "I will be with you or just in the next room during the whole visit," or "You can leave anytime you wish; here is the number to call".
- Help children to identify how they might feel once they are together with family members: "Some kids are nervous when they meet with their parents, other kids are excited, some are sad. How about you?"
- Elicit the child's fantasy of what visiting with family will be like. Correct any misinformation: "*Only Mom will come this time; Dad will be coming next time,*" and respond to feelings.
- Use play, drawings, puppet shows and other forms of communicating with children.

- Children can be helped by being given permission to demonstrate to family members the way in which they have changed and grown during placement. This can ease a sense of divided loyalty between parents and foster parents. *“Let’s be sure to talk with mom about how well you can read now.”*

Preparing Foster Parents for Family Visits

- Foster parents are important partners along with the social worker and the family in visiting. It is the worker’s role to convey this to them and to help them prepare for and be involved in visiting.
- Determine if the foster parents are able and willing to:
 - Value the child/parent relationship
 - Allow visits in their home
 - Supervise visits in their home
 - Document what occurs as requested
 - Provide transportation
 - Help to prepare their foster child for visits
 - Share with parents information and skills relevant to providing a safe home for the child
 - Maintain confidentiality
 - Recognize when they need assistance
- What events currently exist in the child’s day during which visits might be best (e.g., coming home from school, after dinner)?
- Are there prior time commitments for parents and foster parents during which visits should not be scheduled?
- Is the child saying anything about wishing to visit the family?
- What visit arrangements are parents requesting?
- What aspects of the initial visits need to be recorded in order to develop and support case recommendations?
- The worker should also help the foster parents to express their concerns about the visits, such as dealing with:
 - Awkwardness
 - A crying child who can’t be comforted
 - A parent who is angry

- A parent who has been drinking and/or is high on drugs
- Sadness when the visit is over
- Finally, the planning meeting should make clear who will do what in carrying out the visit.

Adapted from and used with permission of *Family Interaction: Expressway to Permanency*, Western Wisconsin Training Partnership, 2005.