



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**

**Division of Social Services**

## **North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Permanency Planning Services Track Training**

### **Participant's Workbook Day Three**

**May 2025**



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## Instructions

This course was designed to guide child welfare professionals through the knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed to engage with families in need of child protection services. The workbook is structured to help you engage in the lesson through reflection and analysis throughout each week of training. Have this workbook readily available as you go through each session to create a long-lasting resource you can reference in the future.

If you are using this workbook electronically: Workbook pages have text boxes for you to add notes and reflections. Due to formatting, if you are typing in these boxes, blank lines will be “pushed” forward onto the next page. To correct this when you are done typing in the text box, you may use delete to remove extra lines.

## Course Themes

The central themes of the Permanency Planning Track Training are divided across several course topics.

- Purpose, Practice Standards, and Legal Aspects
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging
- Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA)
- Communicating
- Family Engagement
- Assessing in Permanency Planning Services
- Trauma-Informed Care
- Permanency Plans and Concurrent Planning
- Attachment
- Family Time
- Shared Parenting
- Working with Relatives
- Partners in the Permanency Planning Process
- Permanency Planning with the Family
- Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement
- Child and Family Team Meetings
- Authentically Engaging Children and Youth
- Family-Centered Permanency Planning
- Quality Contacts
- Preparing for Permanency
- Engaging Relatives
- Placement
- Placement with Relatives

- Monitoring the FSA
- Achieving Permanency
- Adoption
- Documentation
- Worker Safety

## Training Overview

Training begins at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 4:00 p.m. If a holiday falls on the Monday of training, the training will begin on Tuesday at 9:00 a.m. This schedule is subject to change if a holiday falls during the training week or other circumstances occur. The time for ending training on Fridays may vary and trainees need to be prepared to stay the entire day.

Attendance is mandatory. If there is an emergency, the trainee must contact the classroom trainer and their supervisor as soon as they realize they will not be able to attend training or if they will be late to training. If a trainee must miss training time in the classroom, it is the trainee's responsibility to develop a plan to make up missed material.

### Pre-Work Online e-Learning Modules

There is required pre-work for the [Insert Track Name] Track Training in the form of online e-Learning modules. Completion of the e-Learnings is required prior to attendance at the classroom-based training. The following are the online e-Learning modules:

1. North Carolina Worker Practice Standards
2. Safety Organized Practice
3. Understanding and Assessing Safety and Risk
4. Understanding and Screening for Trauma

### Transfer of Learning (TOL) Tool

The Permanency Planning Track Training Transfer of Learning (ToL) tool is a comprehensive and collaborative activity for workers and supervisors to work together in identifying worker goals, knowledge gain, and priorities for further development throughout the training process. In four distinct steps, the worker and supervisor will highlight their goals and action plan related to participating in training, reflect on lessons and outstanding questions, and create an action plan to support worker growth. The tool should be started prior to beginning the Permanency Planning Track Training and re-visited on an ongoing basis to assess growth and re-prioritize actions for development.

Part A: Training Preparation: Prior to completing any eLearning and in-person Track Training sessions, the worker and supervisor should meet to complete Part A: Training Preparation. In this step, the worker and supervisor will discuss their goals for participation in training and develop a plan to meet those goals through pre-work, other opportunities for learning, and support for addressing anticipated barriers.

Part B: Worker Reflections During Training: The worker will document their thoughts, top takeaways, and outstanding questions regarding each section. This level of reflection serves two purposes. First, the practice of distilling down a full section of training into three takeaways and three remaining questions requires the worker to actively engage with the material, subsequently forming cognitive cues related to the information for future use in case practice. Second, prioritizing takeaways and questions by section allows workers to continually review information to determine if questions are answered in future sessions and supports the development of an action plan by requiring workers to highlight the questions they find most important.

Part C: Planning for Post-Training Debrief with Supervisor: The worker considers the takeaways and questions they identified in each section and creates a framework to transfer those takeaways and questions into an action plan.

Part D: Post-Training Debrief with Supervisor: Provides an opportunity for the supervisor and worker to determine a specific plan of action to answer outstanding questions and to further support worker training.

While this ToL is specific to the Track Training in North Carolina, workers and supervisors can review the takeaways and questions highlighted by the worker in each section of training on an ongoing basis, revising action steps when prior actions are completed, and celebrating worker growth and success along the way.

### **Training Evaluations**

At the conclusion of each training, learners will complete a training evaluation tool to measure satisfaction with training content and methods. The training evaluation tool is required to complete the training course. Training evaluations will be evaluated and assessed to determine the need for revisions to the training curriculum.

**All matters as stated above are subject to change due to unforeseen circumstances and with approval.**

## Learning Objectives

### Day 3

<b>Attachment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to provide examples of the purposes of Family Time.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to define emotional and relational permanency and describe the benefits of each type of permanence.</li> </ul>
<b>Family Time</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to discuss the purpose of Family Time.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to defend the importance of Family Time and the reasons why Family Time should be a top priority in case and permanency planning.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to describe the role of Family Time in achieving safety, permanency, and well-being.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to provide examples of the purposes of Family Time.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to articulate their role in supporting successful Family Time and demonstrate that role with thoughtful planning.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to discuss their role in facilitating and supporting Family Time.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to identify and overcome barriers to successful Family Time.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to develop plans to support Family Time regardless of case or systemic barriers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to develop plans for Family Time that provide children in foster care with timely access to time with their parents and siblings following placement into foster care.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to fulfill documentation requirements associated with Family Time.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to describe factors to consider for Family Time based on the child's and parent's needs and strengths.</li> </ul>
<b>Shared Parenting</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to discuss the purpose and importance of shared parenting.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to explain the purpose and benefits of shared parenting.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to describe their role in supporting and facilitating shared parenting.</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to discuss their role in facilitating and supporting shared parenting between parents and out-of-home care providers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to explain the benefits of fully engaging the out-of-home care provider and the child's family in partnership.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to provide examples of shared parenting and different ways that families can participate in shared parenting.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to document and monitor shared parenting communication and activities.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to develop plans to overcome barriers to successful shared parenting partnerships.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to identify and address risks to successful shared parenting partnerships.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Shared Parenting Learning Lab</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to support partnerships between placement providers and the child's parent(s) to promote normalcy.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to develop plans for shared parenting that support the needs of children in out-of-home care and build parental protective capacity.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to identify and address risks to successful shared parenting partnerships</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Working with Relatives</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to develop and support ongoing connections between children and relatives, even if those relatives are not placement providers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to defend the benefits of placement and ongoing connection with relatives.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to develop plans to expand the child's support network by engaging additional relatives to participate in the family team.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to discuss the policy and procedure requirements for the diligent search of relatives from the beginning of the case until case closure.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to discuss their role in the notification process for communication, placement with relatives, permanency, and ensuring connections with relatives, including what information can be shared with relatives, changing roles, and boundaries.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to describe important steps to identify, locate, and engage relative caregivers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to define diligent search requirements and determine steps to identify, locate, and engage relatives for children in out-of-home care.</li> </ul>

## Day Three Agenda

### Permanency Planning Services Track Training

Welcome

#### **Attachment**

#### **Family Time**

The Importance of Family Time

Family Time Basics

Quality Family Time

#### **Shared Parenting**

Overview of Shared Parenting

Shared Parenting Barriers

Supporting Shared Parenting

#### **Shared Parenting Learning Lab**

#### **Working with Relatives**

Relational and Cultural Permanence

Relative Diligent Search

#### **End-of-Day Values Reflection**

## Welcome

- How are people feeling today?
- What was your main takeaway from yesterday?
- Is there any clean-up we need to do?
- Review agenda and learning objectives for the day



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**Use this space to record notes.**

## Attachment



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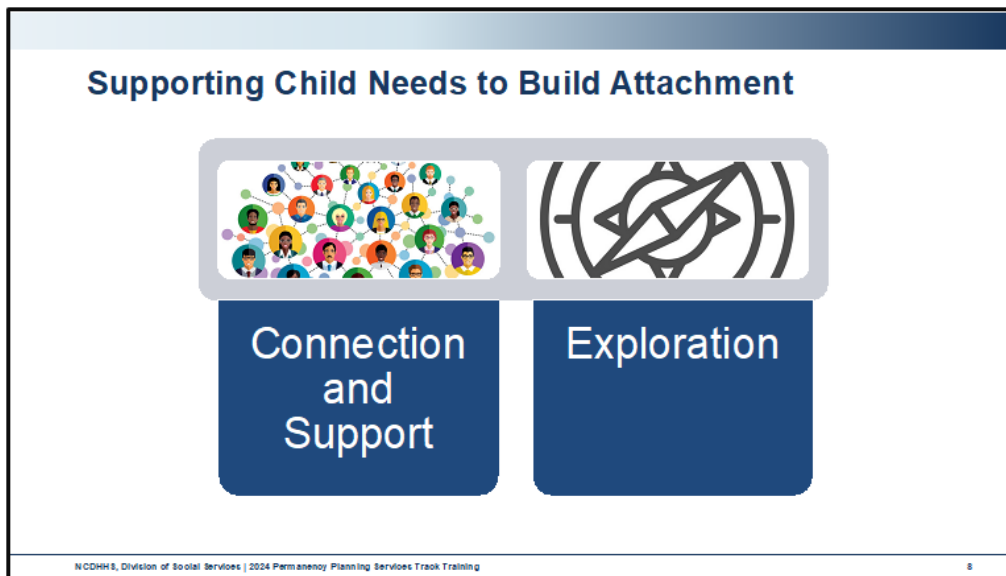
Video: [The Attachment Cycle](#)

**The Attachment Cycle**

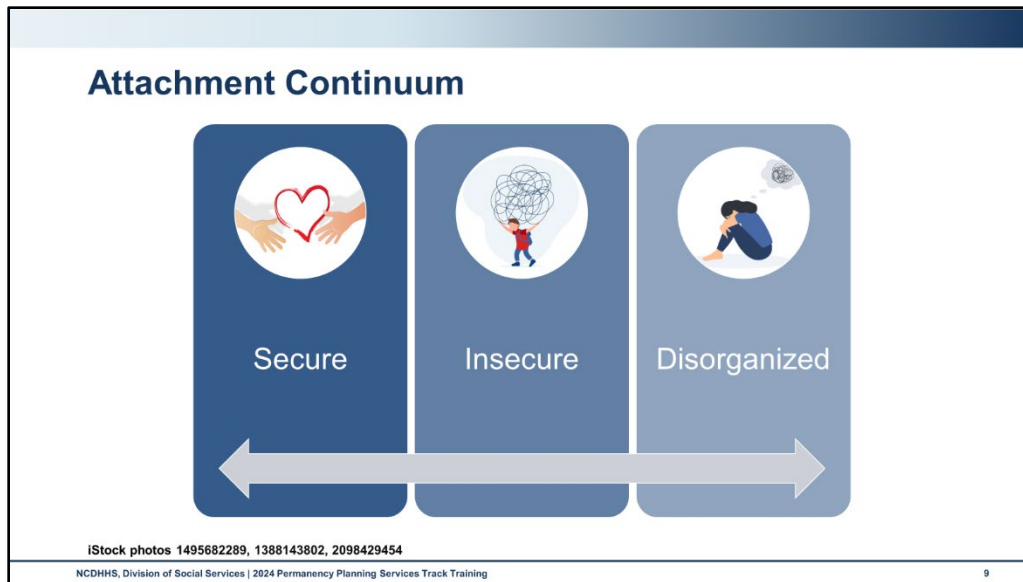
**What is the key component that shapes attachment?**

**What happens when the attachment cycle is disrupted?**

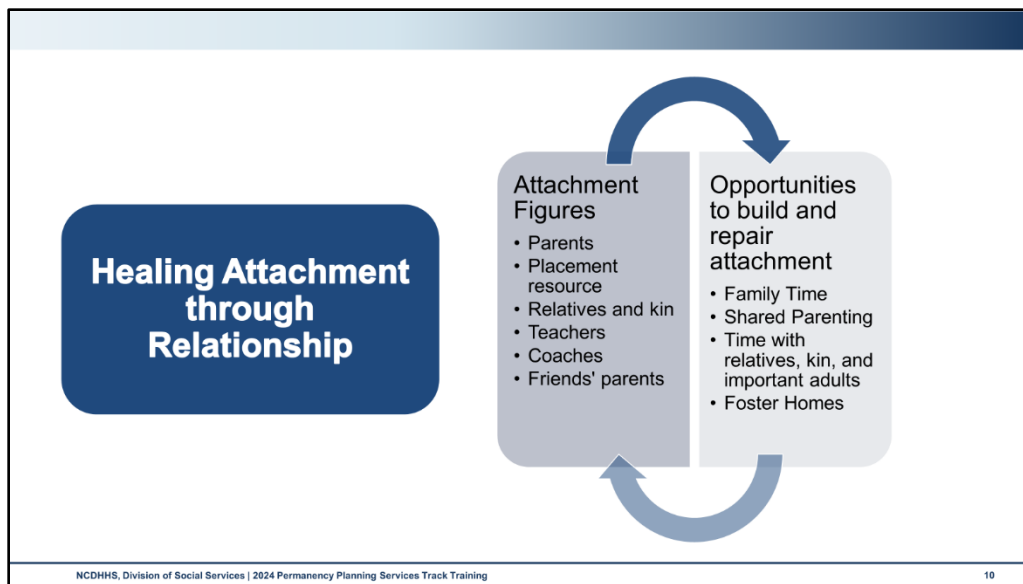
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**How does our understanding of attachment support best practice in Permanency Planning Services?**

**Use this space to record notes**



Reflection and Check-In

**Refer to the Record of Reflections and Values handout at the end of the Appendix and use the space to record values reflections from what you learned in this section of training. Your values reflections should include concepts learned that resonate with you and include any “aha moments”.**

## Family Time

### The Importance of Family Time

Video: North Carolina's Lived Experience: The Birth Parent's Perspective

**North Carolina's Lived Experience video: The Birth Parent's Perspective**

**Use this space to record observations about what stood out to you in this video.**

## Family Time

*"Children develop within the context of their relationship with their primary caretaker or parent. Secure and stable attachments with a primary caregiver form the basis for a child's future social, emotional and cognitive development. Maintaining or healing attachments with parents is critical, since relationships are the conduit for change in young children and families."*

Call to Action: ACF Memo ACYF-CB-IM-20-02 (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/im2002.pdf>)

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**Activity: Family Time Advocacy**

With your small group, create a pitch for Family Time with a critical member of this planning process. The members are:

1. Placement Provider
2. Court and GAL
3. Supervisor
4. Relative and Kin
5. Parent



**Step One:** identify the role and power this member plays in making Family Time successful. For instance, placement providers not willing to transport to Family Time visits can hinder the success of parenting time, and courts ordering supervised visitation time up until reunification can also hinder success.

**Step Two:** Utilize the ACF Bulletin in the Appendix, NC policy, and your experience to develop your pitch. Think about the importance of Family Time, the impact of Family Time, and best practices. Use the ACF bulletin in your workbook, NC policy, and your experience to advocate for and promote quality and frequent Family Time, and best practice with your assigned member. Think about how you will get this member on board.

**Note:** Pay close attention to recommendations that start on page 13 of the ACF Bulletin.

After you have written your pitch advocating for Family Time, you will each have two minutes to give your pitch. Identify your member, their role, and their power around Family Time, and give your pitch.

**Scenarios:**

Develop a pitch advocating for family time based on the scenario you are assigned below:

1. The children have just returned from the visit and are acting out. The resource parent is upset and believes the visits are counterproductive. Educate the resource parent on best practices and pitch the reason family time will continue.
2. The Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) is known for wanting supervised family time. It is early in the case but there are protective factors evident that would keep the children safe for 3 hours of family time. Prepare your pitch for the court for unsupervised parenting time considering how to counter the GAL objections.
3. Your supervisor is out on leave, another child welfare worker got an opportunity to temporarily fill in behind her. Visits are at the agency's discretion. They have been taking place in the office. You have determined that family time in the community, supervised by the relatives, would be safe and benefit progress to get parents back in a natural setting. The worker filling in behind your supervisor is reluctant to make any changes till your supervisor returns. No one is sure when that will be. Develop your pitch for your temporary supervisor and the program manager.

4. The mother relapsed and tested positive for substances. The relative providing care for the children wants the mother's family time suspended as a result. Develop your pitch to inform the relative why suspending the mother's family time would not be an acceptable plan.
5. The case is progressing, and the father is hesitant about increasing family time. His 12-year-old daughter is still angry at him and is either yelling at him or ignoring him at family time. Develop your pitch to discuss with Dad the benefits of increasing family time.

**What is your member's role and power around Family Time?**

**Pitch Development (include what you are advocating for, facts that support your request, best practices, policy, or data that supports your argument):**

## Family Time Basics

**Family Time  
Knowledge  
Check  
True or False**

Family Time must occur between the parent and children within 14 days of the child entering foster care.

---

If in separate placements, Family Time between siblings must occur within 7 calendar days of entering foster care.

---

Family Time and contact plans should be presented at court hearings and incorporated into the court order.

---

To ensure coordination is documented in one place, all Family Time arrangements are made in one plan, even if parents and siblings are visiting separately.


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Parents must be notified within 7 days of any changes to the Family Time and Contact plan.

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### Family Time and Contact Plan







Least Restrictive Environment




Supervision Requirements



Schedule

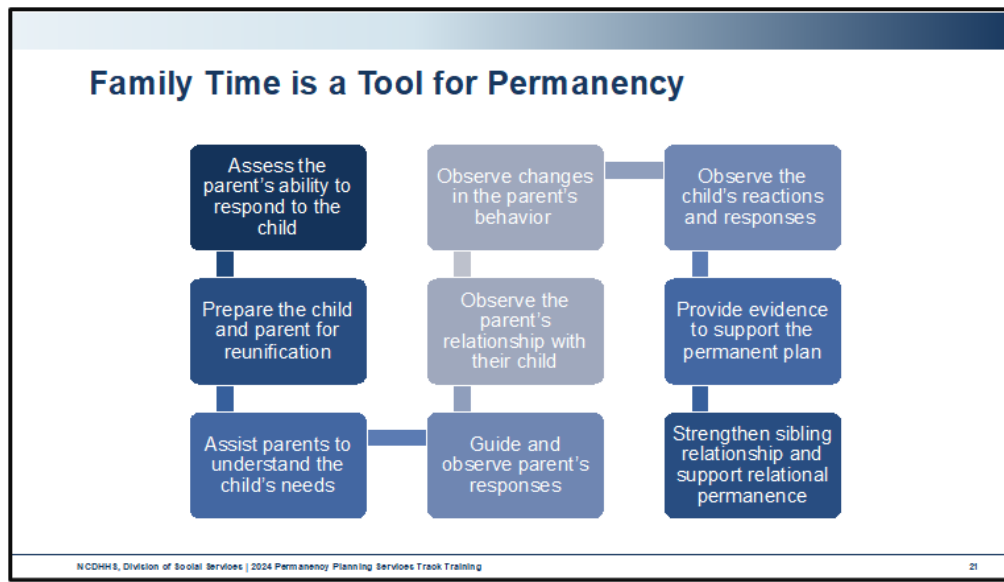


All forms of contact



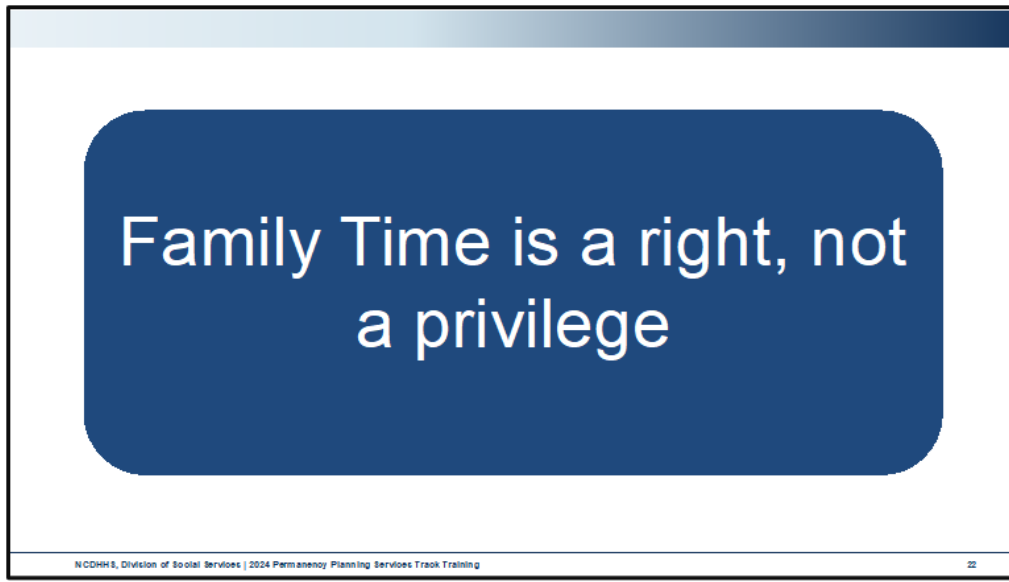
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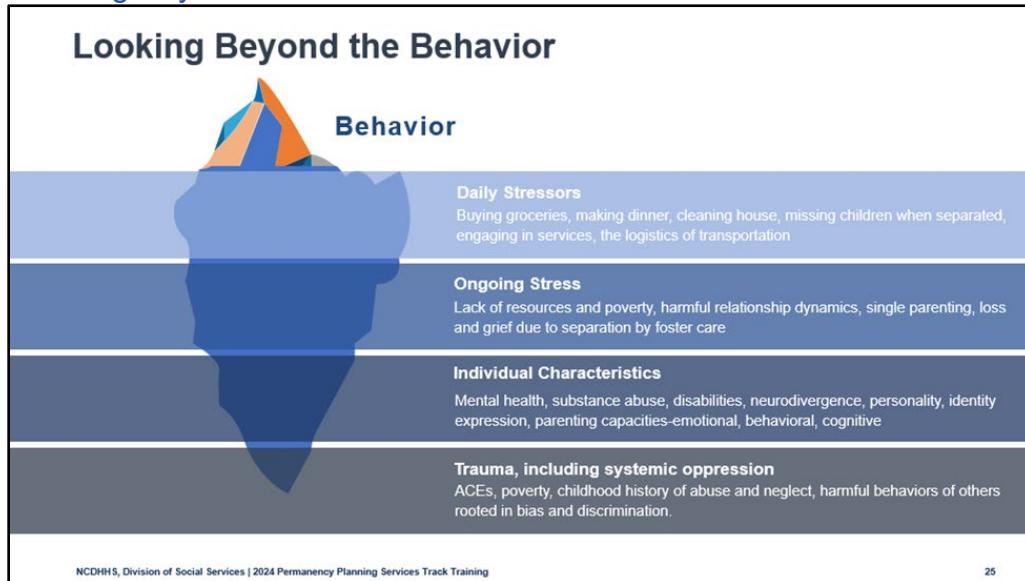




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## Quality Family Time

### Activity: Looking Beyond the Behavior



Ensuring that Family Time is as trauma-informed as possible means considering the parents' and children's trauma histories, their loss and corresponding grief, their daily and ongoing stressors in their life, the typical challenges of parenting children at various ages, and the added pressure of Family Time visits occurring in the presence of a supervisor. All of these elements, as well as the existing relationship dynamics, are present in Family Time visits.

With your group, examine each assigned role and identify individual characteristics and trauma you will need to take into consideration for each of the stressors when planning Family Time.

## Handout: Family Time: Looking Beyond the Behavior

**Family Time Scenarios**

**Scenario One:** The children have just returned from the visit and are acting out. The foster parent is upset and believes the visits are counterproductive.

**Update:** The family is Black and is impacted by poverty. There are two children in this family, a male child who is 4 years-old and a female child who is 11 years-old. The mother languished in foster care as a child, never finding permanence. Family time visits have been occurring at McDonald's. The mother did not know where she could meet with the kids in the community other than what the worker suggested. The children saw their mother arrested at McDonald's previously. The mother has had bad experiences with "the system" and does not trust easily.

**Scenario Two:** The Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) is known for wanting supervised family time. It is early in the case but there are protective factors evident that would keep the children safe for 3 hours of family time.

**Update:** The family is Native American and are members of the Cherokee tribe. The children are all boys ages 6, 8, 10, 12, and 15. The mother and father have a car that needs repairs. The current visits are at the agency which is in a suburb nowhere close to their home. At the last visit, they arrived late and appeared disheveled. No one asked how they were or what happened. The car broke down 3.5 miles away and they ran to the family time visit. The children are placed with the maternal aunt who lives in the parent's neighborhood. The youngest child is on the autism spectrum and struggles with changes in scheduling.

**Scenario Three:** Your supervisor is out on leave, and another child welfare worker gets an opportunity to temporarily fill in behind her. Visits are at the agency's discretion. They have been taking place in the office. You have determined that family time in the community, supervised by the relatives, would be safe and benefit progress to get parents back in a natural setting. The worker filling in behind your supervisor is reluctant to make any changes till your supervisor returns.

**Update:** The family is Mexican American. The parents have 3 children, twin girls who are 6 years old and a 12-year-old girl. The children have been very irritated at family time. The twins have soccer before family time and are hungry. The older sister has a busy day at school followed by math tutoring. She is struggling with math and comes to family time already discouraged. The parents are having problems paying bills since their financial assistance was cut off and have not been able to bring food to the family time.

**Scenario Four:** The mother relapsed and tested positive for substances. The relative providing care for the children wants the mother's family time suspended as a result.

**Update:** The mother is Caucasian, and the children are biracial (Black and White). There are two children, a girl who is 6 months old and a boy who is 4 years old. The children are placed with the maternal grandmother. The mother has a diagnosis of bipolar. The mother and the maternal grandmother have a strained relationship. The maternal grandmother has had her daughter committed to a mental health facility several times within a 5-year span. The mother self-medicates when she stops her psychotropic medications. The mother is aware of her triggers and immediately sought help and got back on her medication after this last incident. The grandmother quickly jumps to conclusions about her daughter's mental health status.

**Scenario Five:** The case is progressing, and the father is hesitant about increasing family time. His 12-year-old daughter is angry at him and is either yelling at him or ignoring him at family time.


**Update:** The father and daughter are Caucasian. The father's 12-year-old daughter was sexually abused by the mother's living together partner from the age of 10-12. The father was incarcerated at the time. He is working multiple jobs, has a lot of scheduling conflicts, and has a hard time planning in advance. He struggles with feelings of guilt. He does not know how to deal with these feelings, so he pulls away. The daughter feels abandoned and interprets her father pulling away as her not being worthy.

Worksheet: Family Time: Looking Beyond the Behavior


Use the space below to identify the stressors, characteristics, and traumas for those involved in your assigned scenario

	Children	Parents
Daily Stressors		
Ongoing Stressors		
Individual Characteristics		
Trauma Histories		


### Facilitating Quality Family Time




## Plan



## Prepare



## During



## After

- [ACF Memo: Family Time](#)
- How can frequent, quality Family Time promote relationships and permanency?
- [Meaningful Family Time with Young Children](#)

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## Handout: Planning for Family Time

### Preparing

- Family time should occur in places that provide as homelike and familiar a setting as possible, while also maintaining safety.
- The visiting space should be comfortable, clean, relatively quiet, and include age-appropriate toys and activities.
- Prepare the child and parents by setting realistic expectations, suggesting parenting strategies, and offering guidance on structuring the visit. Acknowledge any fears expressed and reassure the parent and the child.
- Work with the parent to set an intention for each Family Time, clearly identifying a desire or a focus that will strengthen the parent-child relationship. For example, if reunification is the permanency goal consider suggesting the following activities, cuddling and reading together, playing on the floor together, feeding or bathing the child, talking and using words while playing, practicing nurturing interactions, reading the child's cues to match their needs, any family or cultural rituals like hair styling, prayers, or birthday songs.
- Ensure the placement provider is aware of Family Time and will help to prepare the child.
- Encourage the parent to bring toys, food, or meaningful items from home. Encourage the placement provider to send a favorite toy or comfort item with the child.
- Placement providers can also help children prepare for visits and transition afterward. They may transport children to and from visits and, in some cases, monitor the visits or offer ongoing coaching or support to the child's parents. When the placement provider and the child's parents work as parenting partners, both during and outside of visits, the benefits include more normalcy for children, sharing of information, easing of children's concerns about friction between the placement provider and their parent, and a greater chance for successful reunification.

### During Family Time:

- What happens during family time depends on many factors, including the identified case goals, the age of the child, how long the visits have been happening, the location of the visit, and even the time of year.
- Family Time and Contact Plans should include a parenting skills component, so the interaction during the visit may be a chance for the parent to practice new ways to engage their child.
- Assess for safety during Family Time
- Whenever possible, and approved by the court, unsupervised Family Time should occur.

- Create opportunities for the parent to accompany the placement provider on a visit to the child's doctor or a school event, which can further enhance the connection between parents and their children.
- Routinely encourage the parent to help the child feel secure and safe.
- Observe interactions between the parent and child to determine if they are developmentally appropriate and to assess the level of engagement.
- Help the parent understand the child's behaviors are connected to their emotions.
- Consider how to assist the parent and placement provider in sharing normal duties of parenting.

**After Family Time:**

- At the conclusion of each visit, provide additional feedback.
- The transparency of the feedback process helps to build trust between yourself and the parent.
- Discuss with the parents what worked and areas of growth for next time.
- Check in with the child directly or if that isn't possible with the placement provider to hear the child's reaction and provide support.



**Worksheet: Planning and Preparing**

Considering the stressors, individual characteristics, and trauma histories we just discussed, the age and developmental level of the children, and the parenting skill and capacity of the parents:

**What considerations do you have for the time, location, and activity level of the family time?**

**What steps will you take to prepare yourself for this visit?**

**What steps will you take to prepare the child for the visit?**

**What steps will you take to prepare the parents for the visit?**

**What steps will you take to debrief all involved in the family time visit?**

Reflection and Check-In

**Refer to the Record of Reflections and Values handout at the end of the Appendix and use the space to record values reflections from what you learned in this section of training. Your values reflections should include concepts learned that resonate with you and include any “aha moments”.**

## Shared Parenting

### Overview of Shared Parenting

#### Activity: Family Rules and Traditions

**Thinking about your own life and experiences, what are some traditions, relationships, or cultural activities that have helped shape who you are as a person?**

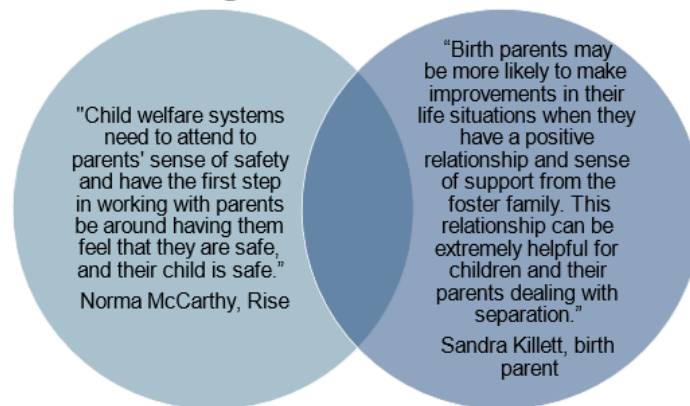
**How did it make you feel to think about those rules and traditions?**

**Were they written or unspoken rules or traditions?**

**What role do you see shared parenting playing in rules and traditions?**

**How can we support a child going into a home with their own family rules and traditions?**

## Shared Parenting



Applying the Science of Child Development in Child Welfare Systems, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University & Sandra Killelt, birth parent

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Use this space to record notes.

## Handout: Shared Parenting Benefits Everyone!

### Shared Parenting Benefits for Everyone

- Feelings of grief and loss that both a child and a birth parent might feel upon separating are minimized. Children can see their birth family is okay and still loves them—this can help a child relax.
- The child's relationship with the birth parent can be maintained.
- Resource parents can form a realistic picture of the birth parent's strengths and needs.
- The birth parents can be reassured that their child is in a nurturing and stable home.
- Resource parents can model effective parenting. By knowing what good parenting looks like, birth parents can practice parenting skills.
- Resource parents can ask birth parents about the child's schedules, fears, allergies, sleep habits, likes, and dislikes. Resource parents can also learn culturally specific child-care strategies from birth family members, which can enhance a child's cultural identity.
- Birth parents can view the resource family as a resource rather than a threat.
- Planning for visitation can be simplified.
- Transitions back into the birth parent's home can be smoother.
- After the child returns home, there can be ongoing support.

Source: Families Rising (Adoptalk 2018, Issue 2)

## Handout: Making Shared Parenting Work

## Making Shared Parenting Work

A social worker should facilitate a meeting between the birth parents and foster parents within a week of placement to ensure that the partnership has a strong beginning and is supported by the agency. This requires advanced planning by social workers so that both families understand the purpose of the meeting (to discuss the care of the child, not “the case”).

Every effort must be made to locate any absent/non-custodial parents. Including absent/non-custodial parents early in the shared parenting meetings encourages both parents of the child to become more involved in the child’s life. (Depending on the nature of the relationship between the custodial parent and the absent/non-custodial parent, a separate meeting between each birth parent and foster parent may be necessary).

A meeting site that is a neutral location that allows for privacy is important. Sometimes neighborhood recreation or social centers are good options instead of the agency office.

**Tips that social workers can use:**

- Ask foster and birth parents at placement how they would like to meet (consider facilitating a conference call or web meeting if distance prevents a parent from attending a face to face meeting)
- Describe shared parenting meetings in positive terms
- Serve as positive role model to foster parents and birth parents
  - Talk positively about birth parent to foster parent
  - Talk positively about foster parent to birth parent
  - Maintain confidentiality
  - Describe foster parent in non-identifying terms at placement
- ❖ Brief foster parents on birth parents’ fears and needs and help foster parents understand these needs.
- Talk openly with all about their concerns
- ❖ Share information essential to shared parental responsibilities with foster parents and birth parents, i.e., medical information, school progress, goals, and the child’s strengths and needs



- Set clear boundaries and ground rules for contact that include input from the birth family, the foster family, and the agency
  - Address personal and emotional safety issues for the child, birth family, and foster family
  - Set ground rules regarding phone calls, visitation, transportation
- Assist foster parent/ birth parent in managing conflict
  - Recognize fears of both parties
  - Focus on strengths
  - Look beyond behaviors to identify needs
  - Develop interventions that meet needs
- Assist foster parent/ birth parent in understanding cultural differences
  - Cultivate a mutual understanding and appreciation of religious beliefs and practices
  - Openly discuss differences in rituals, family experiences, dress and appearance preferences, etc.
- Convey the benefits of aligning around parenting and discipline practices to insure consistency for the child
- Facilitate conversations between birth parent/ foster parent
  - Discuss non-threatening topics
  - Find common areas of interest
  - Recognize both families' strengths
  - Use of self-disclosure
  - Reflect feelings
  - Encourage exchange of information between birth parent and foster parent, i.e. favorite foods, toys, sleep behaviors, pictures, school progress, etc.
- Encourage foster parent and birth parent to attend all school and medical appointments
- ❖ Encourage the two families to work on the child's life book together with the child
- Encourage the two families to attend parenting classes together
- ❖ Initiate discussion with families about strategies that they may use that will support the child's relationship and attachment with both sets of parents to avoid dividing the child's alliance.

**Activity: Shared Parenting**

As a group, we are going to brainstorm and discuss some of the benefits of shared parenting for children, their parents, resource parents, and your agency. There is a poster for each of these parties on the wall. Begin wherever you would like and work around the room, listing one benefit at a time on each list. If you arrive at a list and the benefit you were going to name is already listed, please place a check next to the benefit and then add something that isn't already reflected. Make as many rotations around the room as you can, listing additional benefits as you go until time runs out.

When time is up, take three minutes to walk around the room, noticing additions that have been made to each poster. Notice anything that causes surprise, feels particularly important, or is an aha! Moment and write this down.

**Use this space to record observations and reflections from this exercise.**

Video: [Fostering NC: Creating Permanency](#)  
Fostering NC: Creating Permanency

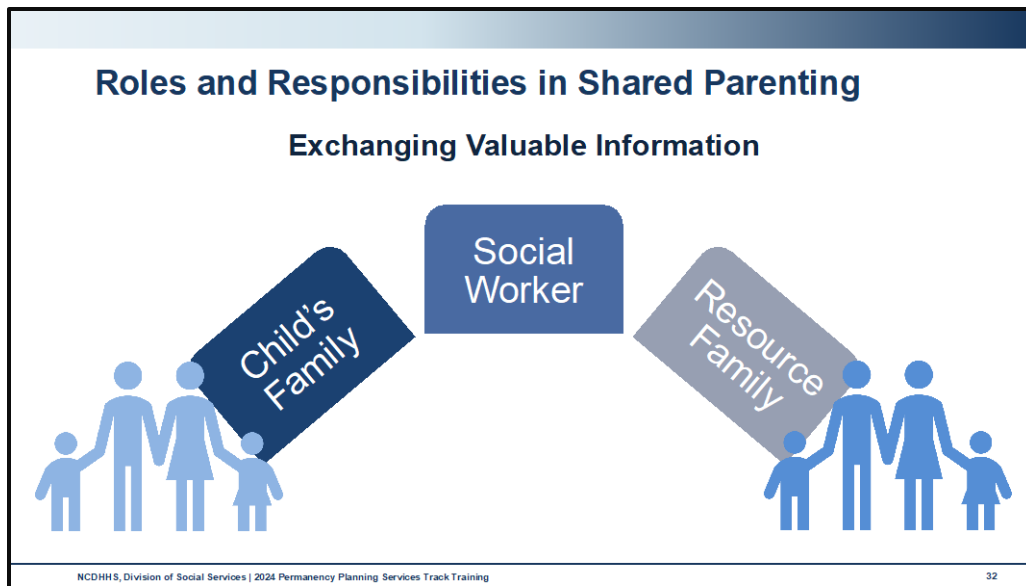
**Use this space to record notes.**

Debrief

**What were some of the benefits of shared parenting that you heard in the video?**

**Which benefits identified in our previous exercise were discussed in the video?**

**What impact do you think the shared parenting relationship might have on permanency for the child discussed in the video?**



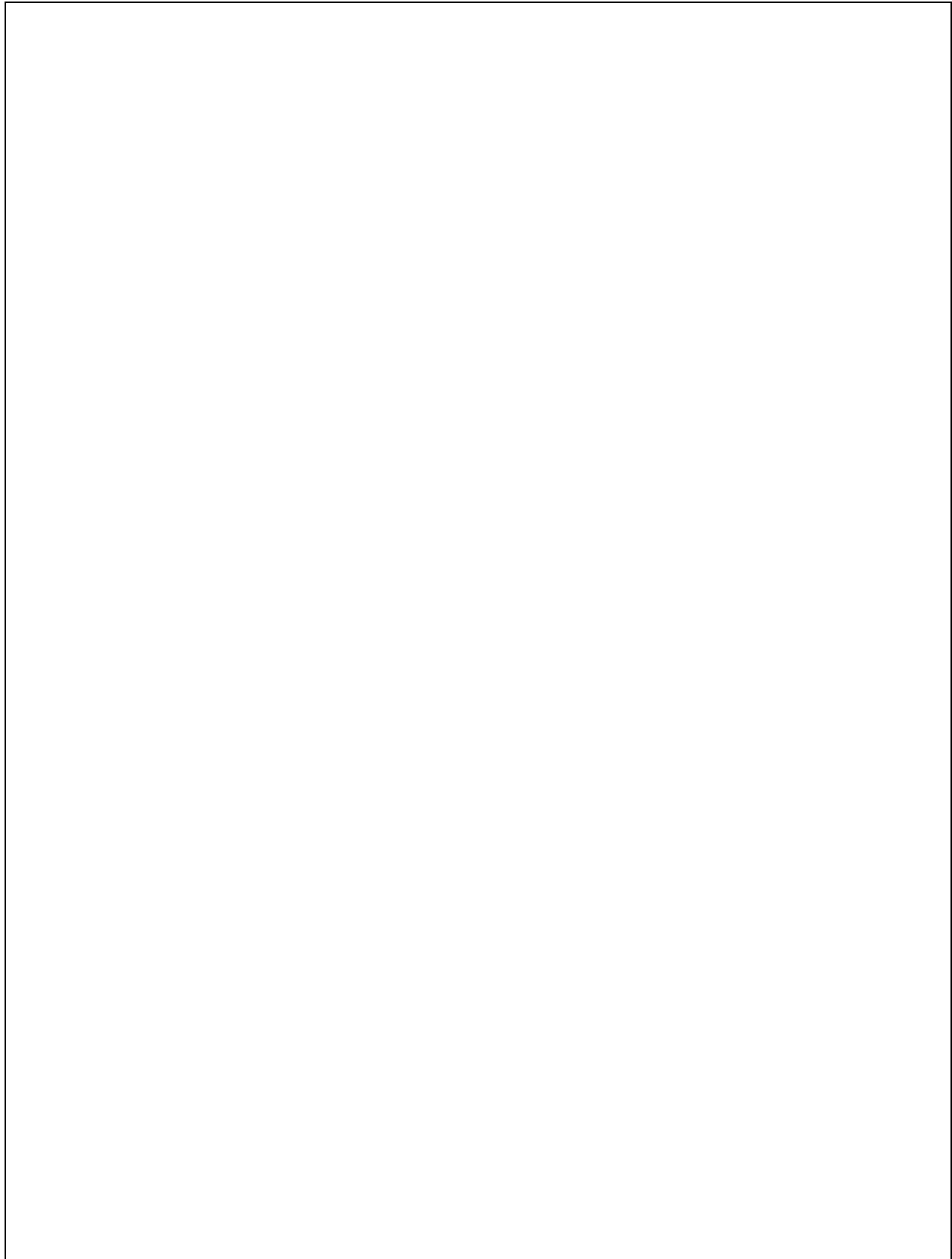
**Resource Family:** The best possible outcome for children removed from their home is when they can be safely returned to their birth family. This outcome is achieved through continued and frequent contact between parents and children while in out-of-home care. Resource parents play vital roles, supplementing and supporting birth families rather than substituting for them. Resource parents must be prepared to care for the child independently while psychologically sharing the child with others. An understanding of the shared parenting framework or model the agency uses is very important for the resource parents to know prior to taking placement of a child.

**Child's Family:** The role of birth parents in shared parenting is equally important for children to understand their past and where they came from. The birth parents must be willing to maintain an active role in shared parenting. Additionally, communication with the child and resource parents on a consistent basis will promote a positive relationship between the child and the resource parent. The positive interactions will also help the child feel secure and strengthen family attachments.

**Social Worker:** The role of the social worker is to continuously cultivate the relationship between the birth parent and the resource parent. Seek out opportunities for shared parenting, communicate this information to all parties, and facilitate activities, if necessary. Think of yourself as a mentor to both the birth and resource parents. There will be teachable moments throughout the duration of a case which will create mentoring and collaborative-parenting relationships between the birth parent and resource parents. This will only strengthen the communication and relationship of all parties and benefit the child involved.

**Use this space to record notes.**

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### Overview of Policy and Procedure Requirements

No later than 14 days after placement

Must occur when children are placed in:

- Licensed foster homes (therapeutic and family foster care)
- Relative and non-relative kinship placements
- Group home placements
- Any other placement in which the county child welfare agency has legal custody, and the child is separated from their parent or caregiver

NC Permanency Planning Services Policy, Protocol, and Guidance (March 2024)

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## Shared Parenting Barriers

Video: [Overcoming Common Barriers to Shared Parenting](#)

Overcoming Common Barriers to Shared Parenting

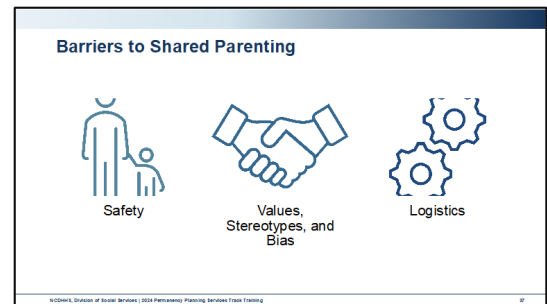
**What barriers and solutions to barriers did you hear during the video?**



Worksheet: Barriers and Solutions to Shared Parenting

Barriers to Shared Parenting fall into three categories:

- Safety considers both physical and psychological safety.
- Values, Stereotypes, and Bias consider the beliefs that we hold that make shared parenting difficult.
- Logistics are the competing demands that get in the way of planning.

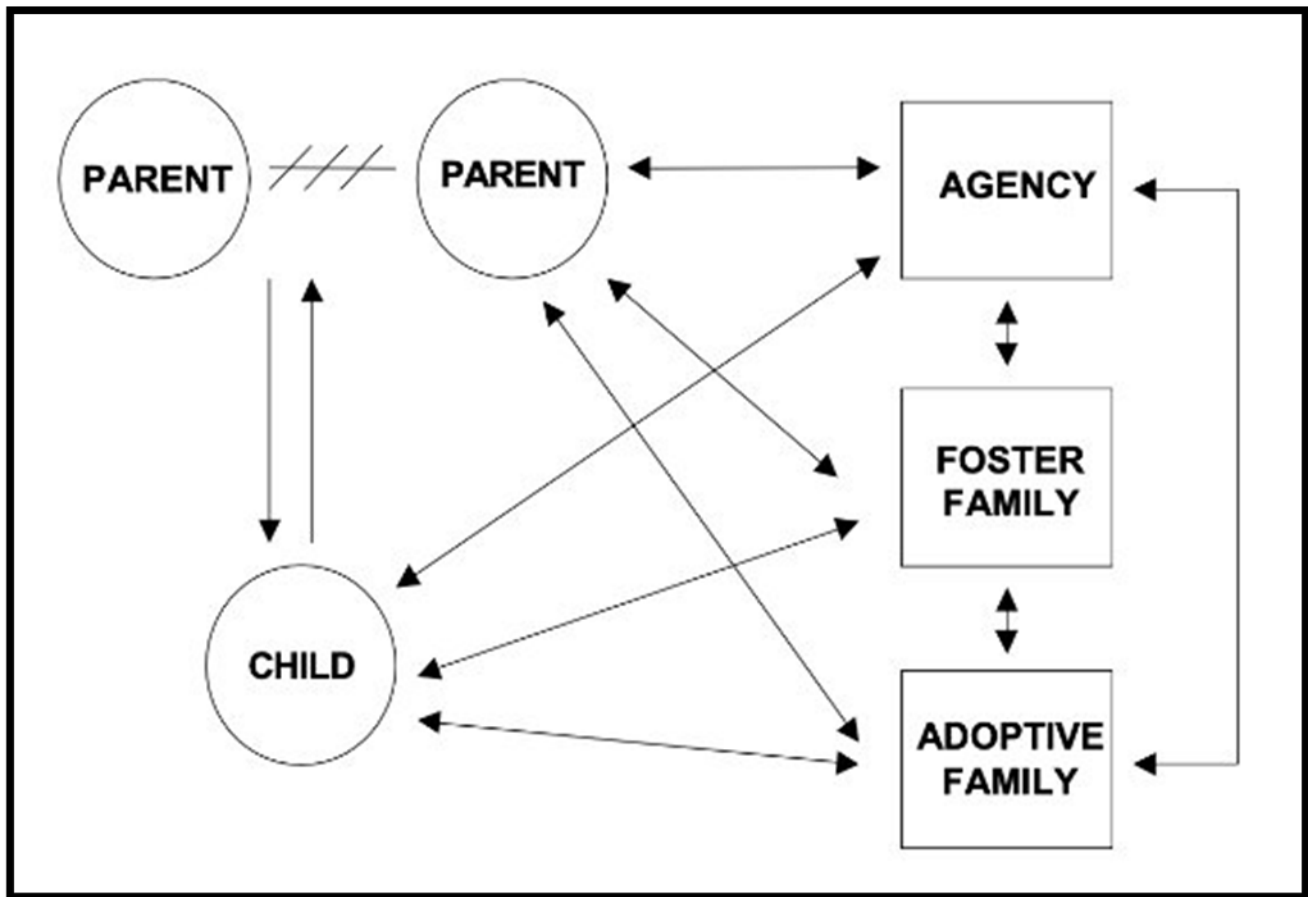


Brainstorming Exercise

Consider how the barriers above apply to parents, social workers, and placement providers.

	Safety	Values, Stereotypes, and Biases	Logistics
Parents			
Social Workers			
Placement Providers			

## Handout: The Alliance Model of Child Welfare Practice



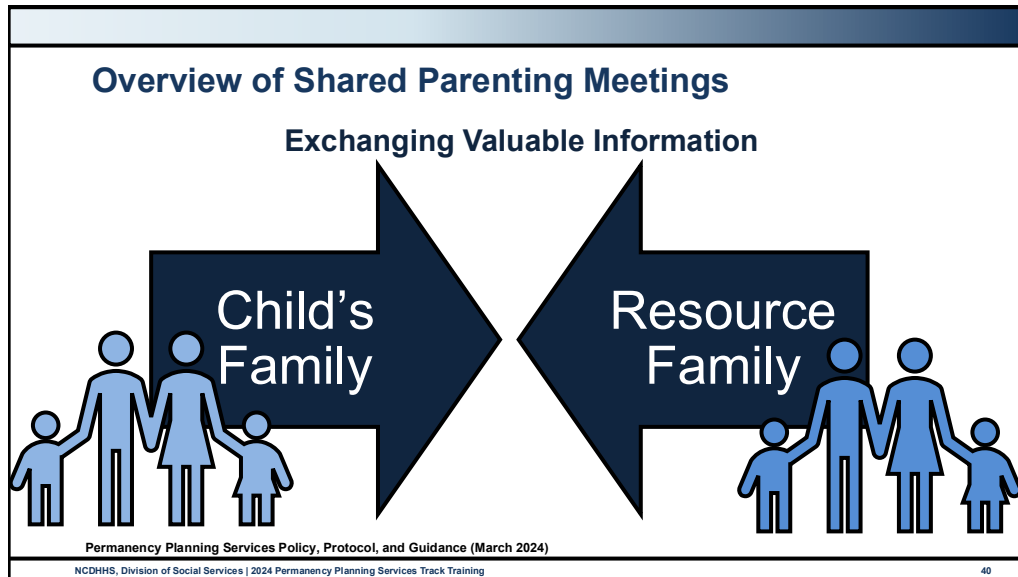
The Alliance Model is an idea developed for staff and parents in child welfare to promote partnerships in parenting.

An alliance in a family refers to two members sharing a common goal or interest that is not detrimental to any other members of the family.

- The lines and arrows in the diagram represent alliances.
- The slash marks across diagram lines represent a damaged or broken alliance.
- Solid lines represent positive alliances.

When there is a broken alliance between members, a child is forced to develop two separate alliances between parties in order to survive.

## Supporting Shared Parenting



**What is the role of the child's family?**

**What is the role of the resource family?**

**What is your role as a facilitator?**

**What topics should be discussed during a shared parenting meeting?**

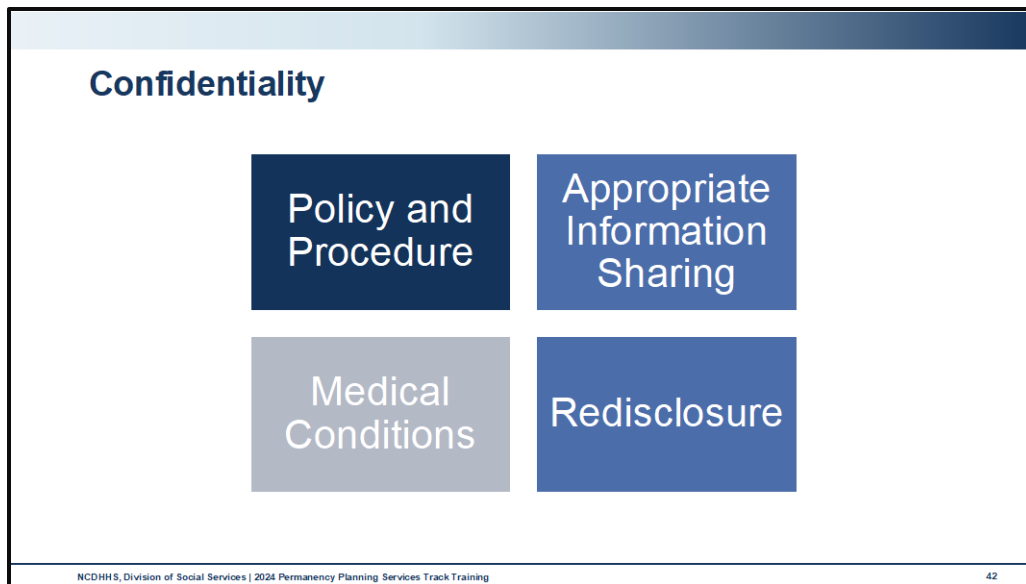
**Skills Practice: Considering Perspectives for Successful Shared Parenting Meetings**

You will work in groups of three and each person will take on one role: the social worker, parent, or resource parent. In each role, you are speaking from the perspective of each person's role, not role-playing an interaction.

For example, in the parent role, you will not act like the parent, you would instead make statements or pose questions to consider the parent's perspective, such as, "parents often feel a lot of emotions around shared parenting, like shame or anger."

The goal of this exercise is not to reach a consensus or walk away with a concrete plan, it is to consider each party's perspective during an initial shared parenting meeting between a new resource parent, a birth parent, and a social worker.

**Use this space to record notes.**



**Use this space to record notes.**

Reflection and Check-In

**Refer to the Record of Reflections and Values handout at the end of the Appendix and use the space to record values reflections from what you learned in this section of training. Your values reflections should include concepts learned that resonate with you and include any “aha moments”.**

## Shared Parenting Learning Lab

### Handout: Lewis Family Additional Information

<b>Raymond Jackson</b> , he/him, 10, Black	
Physical Health	Overall, Raymond is in good health. He is healing from a broken rib as a result of physical abuse caused by his father, George.
Mental Health	Raymond is diagnosed with ADHD and is prescribed medication that he takes in the morning. Raymond says his medicine helps for a little while when he takes it but it “doesn’t last that long.” Raymond describes that he gets distracted and cannot finish tasks at school and it is even worse at home. Raymond said that he feels “stupid” and “worthless” when he forgets things and makes a mess. He described feeling “lost” when he cannot find his belongings or remember where he left something. Raymond has seen the school counselor on several occasions and indicated that he liked having someone to help him become better at remembering things.
Education	Raymond is in 4 <sup>th</sup> grade at Johnson Elementary School. In kindergarten and first grade, he excelled at academic tasks. Although he remained in the same school when he moved from his mother’s home to his father’s, the school staff indicated that Raymond declined in his academics in the second half of third grade, and this has continued into fourth. Raymond was proficient in math and not proficient in reading at the end of third grade. He is often tearful when frustrated and needs constant reminders to stay on task.
Social Supports	Raymond has two good friends, Marcus and Lily. Marcus is in Raymond’s class and Lily is a year older and lived in the same apartment complex.
Interests	Video games, reading graphic novels, drawing, and watching anime
Strengths	Creative, imaginative, and demonstrates empathy and compassion
Identified needs	Academic support, therapy, and medication evaluation



<b>Van Jackson</b> (legal name Vanessa), they/them, 14, Black	
Physical Health	Overall, Van is in good health. Van has expressed a desire for more gender-affirming care and support around chest binding.
Mental Health	Van describes themselves as “anxious.” They said that they are constantly worrying about Raymond and their mom, feel a sense of doom most of the time, and have a hard time focusing because of their worry. Van is open to talking to a therapist.
Education	Van is in 8 <sup>th</sup> grade at Johnson Middle School. They are on the A/B honor roll and are described as an extremely hard worker by their teachers. Van hopes to take honors classes in high school next year.
Social Supports	Van has a close-knit group of friends: Henry, Sam, Molly, and Patrice. The group have been friends since kindergarten and although very different in their clubs and interests, hang out often and are supportive of one another. Van reports being very close to their mom before she went to prison.
Interests	Basketball and skateboarding. Van hopes to be on the middle school basketball team that starts in two weeks. Reading romance novels, watching Euphoria, and the Scream movie series, and hanging out with their friends.
Strengths	Athletic, driven, hard worker, “good head on their shoulders” and a good friend
Identified needs	Therapy, gender-affirming medical care

Activity: Shared Parenting Opportunities

**What factors, dynamics, and characteristics might support the shared parenting of Raymond and Van?**

Skills Practice: Shared Parenting Considerations and Planning

Assigned Family Member's Name	
Considerations: What should I consider about this person when preparing for the meeting?	
Anticipated Meeting Outcome(s)	
Considerations and information needed to share or not share per confidentiality requirements	
Concerns this person may have about engaging in shared parenting	
Barriers/Safety Concerns that must be addressed	
Planning: What statements, letters, and talking points do you need to prepare for the shared parenting meeting?	

**Activity:** Shared Parenting Engagement Practice

**PP Social Worker:** using your prepared statements, letters, or lists of talking points, engage the parent in preparing and planning for shared parenting.

**Laverne, George, or Monica:** role play as the parent. Be kind while being true to that person's perspective and ask a question to allow the PP Social Worker to practice.

**Observer:** keep time for the five-minute practice. Make note of strengths and family-centered actions taken by the PP Social Worker.

When time is up, switch places and repeat the exercise until all three participants have an opportunity to practice each role.

**Use this space to record notes.**

**Activity: Shared Parenting Conflict Management**

Each group will receive one statement card that reflects something one of the birth parents or the resource parent might say during the shared parenting meeting that could cause conflict. You will role-play how to respond to a conflictual statement by validating feelings, honoring perspective, or recognizing their intentions and addressing the negative impact. The roles for this exercise will be the same: PP Social Worker, Parent, and Observer.

When time is up, switch places and repeat until all three participants have had an opportunity to practice managing conflict.

**Use this space to record notes.**

Reflection and Check-In

**Refer to the Record of Reflections and Values handout at the end of the Appendix and use the space to record values reflections from what you learned in this section of training. Your values reflections should include concepts learned that resonate with you and include any “aha moments”.**

## Working with Relatives

### Relational and Cultural Permanence

Cultural Permanency

Cultural Permanency

Having a **strong** and **positive** connection to one's ethnic group is **predictive** of high self-esteem, academic achievement, psychological adjustment, coping abilities, and lower levels of depression and loneliness.

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Relational Permanency

Relational Permanency

The existence of one or more **strong, sustainable and supportive relationships** between a youth and caregivers, siblings and other individuals that a youth considers part of their **family**.

Authentic Relationships Matter Most: A new model for permanency (Texas Youth Permanency Study, March 2018)

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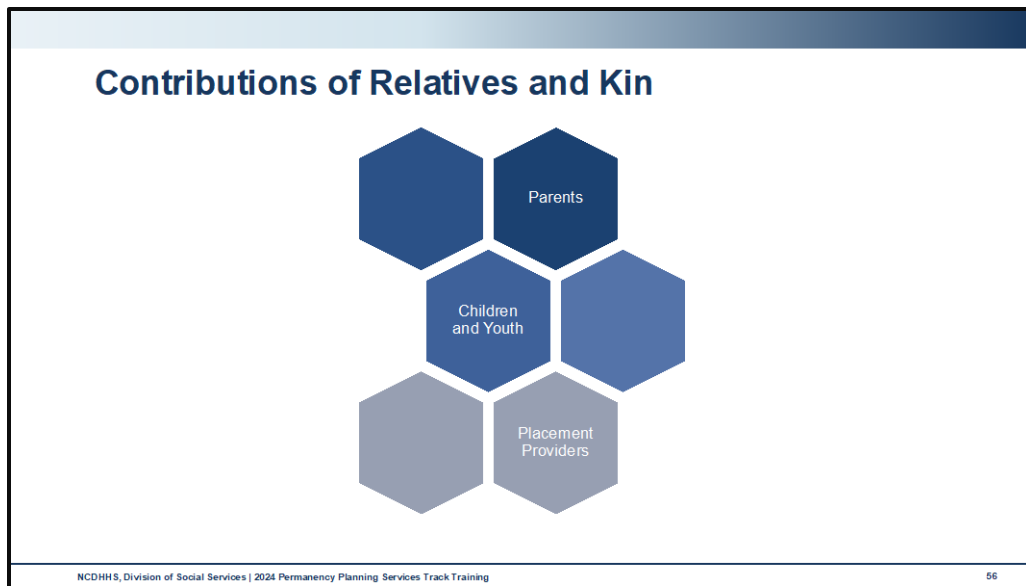


### Sibling Visitation

- Sibling bonds are among the strongest that humans experience
- Siblings must have frequent and ongoing visitation
- Family Time with siblings must occur within seven calendar days of placement

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**In what ways might relatives and kin support protective factors for parents?**

## Relative Diligent Search

### Identifying Relatives

Interviewing the child and the child's parents or caretakers

Utilizing tools such as Circles of Safety and Support, genograms, ecomaps, and lifebooks

Using family decision-making meetings such as CFT meetings to ask participants to help identify other relatives of the child

Contacting identified relatives and requesting names of other relatives

Accessing the services history in NCPATH or internal county agency databases such as child welfare and child support

Utilizing internet-based search tools, including social media.

[Permanency-Planning-March-2024.pdf \(ncdhhs.gov\)](#)

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**Relative  
Notification  
Knowledge  
Check  
True or False**

Efforts to identify and notify all adult relatives must occur within the first 60 days of a child's removal from their parent or caretaker.

---

Relatives are only those related by blood.

---

Adoptive parents of a sibling are considered relatives of the legal child.

---

The Relative Notification, the Relative Interest, and the Relative Search Information are all the same thing.

---

Efforts to engage both maternal and paternal relatives should be made equally, even if both parents are not equally involved.

---

Efforts to engage relatives and kin must be made quarterly after initial efforts are made.

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## Sharing Information with Relatives

### Notification must include:

- That the child has been removed from the custody of the parent
- The options the relative has under federal, state, and local law to participate in the care and placement of the child
- The options that may be lost by failing to respond to the notice
- The requirements to become a family foster home
- The services and supports that are available for children in a foster home
- How relative guardians of the child may receive kinship guardianship assistance payments if the county child welfare services agency has elected to offer such payments

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**Use this space to record notes.**

Reflection and Check-In

**Refer to the Record of Reflections and Values handout at the end of the Appendix and use the space to record values reflections from what you learned in this section of training. Your values reflections should include concepts learned that resonate with you and include any “aha moments”.**

## End of Day Values Reflection

Use this space to record questions and reflections about what you have learned.

**In small groups at your table, share at least one value from this training today that will shape how you support and advocate for families in Permanency Planning Services. Use this space to record notes from the group conversation.**



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Appendix: Handouts

Family Time Bulletin ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Planning for Family Time..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Shared Parenting Benefits Everyone! ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Making Shared Parenting Work..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

The Alliance Model of Child Welfare Practice..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Record of Reflections and Values ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

## Family Time Bulletin

<b>ACF</b>  <b>Administration for Children and Families</b>	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES Administration on Children, Youth and Families	
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	<b>3. Originating Office:</b> Children's Bureau	
	<b>4. Key Words:</b> Family time and visitation for children and youth in out-of-home care; Trauma; Well-Being; Best Practices	

**TO:** State, Tribal and Territorial Agencies Administering or Supervising the Administration of Titles IV-E and IV-B of the Social Security Act, and State and Tribal Court Improvement Programs.

**SUBJECT:** Family Time and visitation for children and youth in out-of-home care.

**LEGAL AND RELATED REFERENCES:** Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act.

**PURPOSE:** To provide information on research, best practices, resources and recommendations for providing children and youth in out-of-home care safe, meaningful and high frequency family time that strengthens the family, expedites reunification and improves parent and child well-being outcomes. This information memorandum (IM) emphasizes the importance of family time and visitation in reducing the trauma of removal and placement of children in out-of-home care, maintaining the integrity of the parent-child relationship, healthy sibling relationships and overall child and family well-being.

#### BACKGROUND

Children in out-of-home care often face many unintended and undesirable consequences that adversely affect them in childhood and follow them into adulthood, even when out-of-home care is necessary to protect their safety. Placing a child in out-of-home care can cause irreparable damage to the child and the broader family unit.<sup>1</sup> Removal and subsequent continued separation

<sup>1</sup> See, Church, C., Mitchell, M., and Sankaran, V. (2019). A CURE WORSE THAN THE DISEASE? THE IMPACT OF REMOVAL ON CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES, 102 Marq. L. Rev. 1163. See also Sugrue, E. (2019). *Evidence Base for Avoiding Family Separation in Child Welfare Practice: An Analysis of Current Research*. Commissioned by [Alia](https://protect2.fireeye.com/url?k=65d4abfc-3980b280-65d49ac3-0cc47ade5fa2-09cda7b346d2009a&u=https://researchbrief.aliainnovations.org/).  
<https://protect2.fireeye.com/url?k=65d4abfc-3980b280-65d49ac3-0cc47ade5fa2-09cda7b346d2009a&u=https://researchbrief.aliainnovations.org/>



makes the sustenance of primary relationships and prospects of reunification more problematic. The loss a child experiences when separated from his or her parent or parents is profound and can last into adulthood.<sup>2</sup> In terms of evolutionary biology, losing a parent or primary protective adult can represent a grave danger to survival for a child. Evidence of this activation and its harmful physiological and psychological consequences is well established.<sup>3</sup> Attachment science shows that the emotional and psychological ramifications of child removal from primary caregivers occur even if the removals are relatively brief. Short-term removals can interfere with a child's sense of safety, and multiple critical capacities, including learning, curiosity, social engagement, and emotional regulation.<sup>4</sup>

Following removal from parents, children and youth are often scared and confused and have incomplete understandings of what is happening to their families, why they are not with their families and what their future will hold. When they lack basic information about the status of their parent or caregiver, they may imagine worst-case scenarios and/or experience feelings of abandonment.<sup>5</sup> This uncertainty has been characterized as ambiguity of loss and provides evidence that ambiguity (not knowing or having the capacity to comprehend why they are not with their parents, where their parents are, or what will happen to him or her) is a tremendous source of stress and trauma.<sup>6</sup> Children and youth are at their most traumatized stage immediately following removal and often do not see their parents for days or weeks, which can exacerbate stress responses and compound trauma.<sup>7</sup>

What the field most often regards as “visitation” and “visitation plans” seldom fulfills the needs that parents and children have for meaningful and nurturing time together. This language often implies standard visitation schedules whereby all parents receive a predetermined amount of supervised time with their child, regardless of the parents’ circumstances and protective capacities, and for “visitation” to increase only as parents “earn” the right for longer and unsupervised interactions.

Viewing child and family contacts during foster care less as “visits” and more as “family time” suggests the critical importance of the length and quality of time that children spend with their parents, separated siblings, and other important family members. “Family time” can occur when the parent and/or family participates in normal parenting activities, such as sharing meals,

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<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> See Complex Trauma, Nat'l Child Traumatic Stress Network, <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/complex-trauma>

<sup>4</sup> See Kimberly Howard et al., Early Mother-Child Separation, Parenting, and Child Well-Being in Early Head Start Families, 13 *Attachment & Hum. Dev.* 5, 21 (2011).

<sup>5</sup> See Monique B. Mitchell, *The Neglected Transition: Building a Relational Home for Children Entering Foster Care* 6 (2016); see also Pauline Boss, *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief* 5-8 (1999); Lyn R. Greenberg, Barbara J. Fidler, Michael A. Sani, *Evidence-Informed Interventions for Court-Involved Families: Promoting Healthy Coping and Development* 261 (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Id.

medical appointments and school events. It can occur in the homes of resource families or in the family's home. The frequency, duration and intensity of "family time" takes into account the needs of children, depending upon their age and stage of development, and the capacities of parents to share parenting roles with resource families.

This IM is organized as follows:

- I. Family Time: Research and Best Practices
- II. Inadequate Family Time: Research and Best Practices
- III. Resources and Innovation to Support Strong Family Time Practice
- IV. Recommendations
- V. Conclusion
- VI. Resources

## INFORMATION

### I. Family Time: Research and Best Practices

Family time is critical to maintaining the parent-child relationship when a child is in out-of-home care.<sup>8</sup> We can protect and strengthen the parent-child relationship from the time of removal throughout a child's entire time in care by ensuring parents are fully encouraged and supported to participate in all parenting activities and decisions. While some parenting approaches can be improved through increased knowledge of child development, learning appropriate discipline techniques and other capacity building efforts that enhance parental protective factors, the relationship between the parent and child is paramount.

#### *Research*

Frequency and duration of family time: A growing body of research associates regular, meaningful family time for children in out-of-home care with several positive outcomes, including:

- Enhanced parental engagement;
- Greater likelihood of reunification;
- Expedited permanency;
- Increased chances of reunification being sustained;
- More meaningful connections to parents for older youth without reunification as permanency goal; and

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<sup>8</sup> Haight, W. L., Mangelsdorf, S., Black, J., Szewczyk, M., Schoppe, S., Giorgio, G., Tata, L. (2005). Enhancing parent-child interaction during foster care visits: Experimental assessment of an intervention. *Child Welfare*, 84, 459-81.

- Among children discharged from out-of-home care, those who visited more frequently with their parents were in care for shorter periods.<sup>19</sup>
- Among children under age 10 who had been reunified, more frequent visits were associated with shorter placements in out-of-home care.<sup>20</sup>
- In a longitudinal study of all children placed in foster care for at least 90 days in New York City, the occurrence of visits made it more likely for children to reunify with their parents, with reunification being more likely with a higher frequency of visits than a lower frequency or no visits.<sup>21</sup>
- A study of children in out-of-home care who had an incarcerated parent found that difficulties accessing services and with visitation present barriers to reunification.<sup>22</sup>

Immediacy of family time: Research suggests meaningful family time close in time to removal may help reduce stress and anxiety for children in out-of-home care.

Providing quality family time: The quality of time a parent spends with his or her child is critical for the strength of relationships of all families, especially a family involved with the child welfare system. Likewise, many factors may affect the quality of time a parent and child spend together. This includes: who is present, where the time together is spent, how the time together is spent, whether attention is focused or divided, the ability of parent or child to be emotionally present, the physical health and social, emotional and psychological health of a parent or child and numerous other stressors or stimuli.

Parents with lived experience in child welfare commonly report that the presence of a government employee or private social worker with decision-making authority over the future of their families can affect the quality of the time a parent spends with his or her child. In this situation, a parent may feel uncomfortable and have difficulty engaging with his or her child. Research shows that supervised family time can and often does affect the comfort levels of parents and children and can inhibit the ability of a parent or child to interact freely. A child welfare agency should not assume that a child in an out-of-home care automatically means visitation must be supervised. Out-of-home care may be necessary for a variety of reasons; however, that does not mean it is unsafe for parents and children to spend time together without supervision. This is particularly true for families with older children, and those cases involving neglect.

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<sup>19</sup> Milner, J. L. (1987). An ecological perspective on duration of foster care. *Child Welfare*, 66, 113–123.

<sup>20</sup> White, M., Albers, E., & Bitonti, C. (1996). Factors in length of foster care: Worker activities and parent-child visitation. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 23, 75–84.

<sup>21</sup> Fanshel, D., & Shinn, E. B. (1978). *Children in foster care: A longitudinal investigation*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>22</sup> Supra at note 13, D'Andrade & Valdez, 2012; López, del Valle, Montserrat, & Bravo, 2013.



Data show that the majority of older youth in the child welfare system have contact with their parents in varying degrees, but often those relationships are unacknowledged, unsupported or discouraged. Failing to recognize and promote such relationships may leave youth on their own to manage complicated relationships and feelings.<sup>23</sup> Research shows that supporting and strengthening parent and older youth relationships can result in permanency through reunification, and can be crucial to achieving permanency with other individuals. Family time with older youth is important because even where a parent may not be an option as a caregiver, they can be a valued member of the youth's network of support; even in instances of termination of parental rights.

### ***Best Practices***

Liberal, creative, and robust family time strengthens parent child relationships, promotes child and family well-being, and expedites reunification. Many states, national professional membership organizations and advocacy groups identify best practices for family time:

- Georgia statute specifies that “there shall be a presumption that visitation shall be unsupervised unless the court finds that unsupervised visitation is not in a child's best interests.”<sup>24</sup> The Georgia Court Improvement Program (CIP) has issued a comprehensive guide for judges to ensure strong judicial decision-making on family time.<sup>25</sup> The guide provides an overview of research, case law, and best practices for judges to utilize in assessing and ordering family time plans. It also provides judges with the information necessary to make well-informed orders that will promote the well-being of the child.
- The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Ongoing Services Standards identifies family interaction while a child is in out-of-home care as critical for “minimizing placement-induced trauma caused by separation” and recognize that such contact is critical to enhancing attachment.<sup>26</sup> The Standards also recommend that the agency think broadly about the individuals that may be important in the child's life with whom continued contact would be helpful, including: friends, neighbors, and extended family as defined by culture and spiritual communities.<sup>27</sup> Family interaction includes parent attendance in regular parenting activities, such as medical appointments and school events, and time specifically for visits. The standards recommend that visits occur in the least restrictive setting, account for the child's developmental needs, highlight a

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<sup>23</sup> See Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K., & Vorhies, V. (2011). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 26*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

<sup>24</sup> O.C.G.A. § 15-11-112(b) (2013)

<sup>25</sup> See <http://www.gacip.org/family-time-practice-guide/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/cwportal/policy/pdf/ongoing-services-standards.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

preference for family-like visit settings, and speak to the importance of decreasing levels of supervision during visits where reunification is the permanency goal.<sup>28</sup>

- Illinois statute places visitation in the context of reasonable efforts and permanency planning articulating that, “the frequency, duration, and locations of visitation shall be measured by the needs of the child and family and not by the convenience of the department.”<sup>29</sup> The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services family visitation rules recognize “a strong correlation” between the frequency parental visits and parent child contacts more generally. Where reunification is the permanency goal, the rules call for visits to occur in the family home and an increase in the length of time to aid with the transition of the child to his or her family home, absent a threat to safety.
- Illinois policy provides additional support for family time by clarifying that agencies can reimburse caregivers who provide the location, supervision, mentoring, or transportation for “family-setting activities” that include “parenting activities such as help with homework, hobbies, meal preparation, chores, getting ready for nap or bedtime” that is also available for parents who are incarcerated or hospitalized.<sup>30</sup>
- Michigan law requires the child welfare agency to monitor “in-home visitation between the child and his or her parents. To ensure the occurrence of in-home visits required under this subsection, the supervising agency shall institute a flexible schedule to provide a number of hours outside of the traditional workday to accommodate the schedules of the individuals involved.”<sup>31</sup>
- Numerous leading national professional membership organizations and advocacy groups provide best practices for family time. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) highlights the importance of family time in the Enhanced Resource Guidelines, a resource developed to support judges in child welfare practice. The guidelines include a principle statement that, “consistent with child safety, relationships between and among children, parents, and siblings are vital to child well-being. Judges must ensure that quality family time is an integral part of every case plan. Visitation should be liberal and presumed unsupervised unless there is a demonstrated, safety risk to the child. Sibling time apart from parental family time is also important. Family time should not be used as a case compliance reward or consequence.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Id at 166 (PDF 176); 167 (PDF 177).

<sup>29</sup> See <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/cwportal/policy/pdf/ongoing-services-standards.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Illinois Family Reunification support Special Service Fee—Policy Guide  
[https://www2.illinois.gov/dcf/aboutus/notices/Documents/policy\\_guide\\_2007.06.pdf](https://www2.illinois.gov/dcf/aboutus/notices/Documents/policy_guide_2007.06.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> MCL 722.954b

<sup>32</sup> NCJFCJ Enhance Resource Guidelines Principle—Ensuring Family Time)

- A joint publication of the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law and NCJFCJ identifies visitation as a key factor for judges to consider in making reasonable efforts determinations pursuant to the Adoption Assistance and Safe Families Act (ASFA). The publication states that, “quality visitation plans between young children, their parents, siblings and extended family members directly relate to ASFA mandates for timely permanency and reasonable efforts.”<sup>33</sup>
- The American Humane Association, Center for the Study of Social Policy, Child Welfare League of America, Children’s Defense Fund, and Zero-To-Three issued a call to action on the need for children to have strong and healthy relationships; stating that, “children develop within the context of their relationship with their primary caretaker or parent. Secure and stable attachments with a primary caregiver form the basis for a child’s future social, emotional and cognitive development. Maintaining or healing attachments with parents is critical, since relationships are the conduit for change in young children and families.”<sup>34</sup>
- The American Bar Association and Zero-To-Three co-authored a publication to build legal and judicial knowledge on the developmental needs of children. The authors highlight the effects of parent-child separation on very young children, emphasizing that “the younger the child and the longer the period of uncertainty and separation from the primary caregiver, the greater the risk of emotional and developmental harm to the child.”<sup>35</sup>

## **II. Inadequate Family Time: Research and Best Practices**

Inadequate family time can impede parental engagement, inhibit healthy parent child bonding, disrupt and damage relationships, delay permanency, and perpetuate trauma for both children and parents.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Research***

<sup>33</sup> American Bar Association, National Council of Family and Juvenile Court Judges, *Healthy Beginnings, Healthy Futures: A Judge’s Guide*, 2009, p. 105.

<sup>34</sup> American Humane Association, Center for the Study of Social Policy, Child Welfare League of America, Children’s Defense Fund, and Zero to Three. *A Call to Action on Behalf of Maltreated Infants and Toddlers*. 2011, p. 5)

<sup>35</sup> American Bar Association and Zero to Three, *Visitation with Infants and Toddlers in Foster Care: What Judges and Attorneys Need to Know*, July 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Kendra L. Nixon et al., “Every Day It Takes a Piece of You Away”: Experiences of Grief and Loss Among Abused Mothers Involved with Child Protective Services, 7 J. Pub. Child Welfare 172, 182-83 (2013); E. Wall-Wieler et al., Maternal Health and Social Outcomes After Having a Child Taken into Care: Population-based Longitudinal Cohort Study Using Linkable Administrative Data, 71 J. Epid. Comm. Health 1145 (2017).



Research shows ending or reducing family time due to a parent's non-compliance with a case plan is problematic and can negatively impact parental engagement and well-being.<sup>37</sup> Parents with lived-experience report time with their children to be motivating and help them stay focused on successfully completing treatment or more generally meeting the conditions of case plans. Conversely, parents report feelings of frustration, loneliness and despair in situations where meaningful contact with their children is limited, reduced or canceled. Parents also report that despite strong desires to spend time with their children, it is sometimes difficult to meet family time schedules due to a variety of every day challenges that may exist in the life of parents involved with the child welfare system.

A number of social and economic factors may limit a parent's ability to comply with a case plan. The challenges of poverty, such as limited access to transportation, inflexible employment schedules and lack of financial resources, can all combine to make case plan compliance and honoring family time schedules difficult. It is important for agencies and judges to be mindful that ending or reducing family time as a form of punishment for noncompliance may have deleterious effects on parental progress and cause additional challenges or setbacks in treatment and recovery.<sup>38</sup> Family time plans should consider the parent's circumstances, including the resources to which they might have access. When a parent cannot attend a visit, it is important not to assume a lack of interest.

Research suggests that ending or reducing family time due to perceived or observed negative emotional responses of the child in anticipation of seeing his or her parents or following time spent together is also problematic.<sup>39</sup> Such responses in children are complex, and often an expected result of a child dealing with the trauma or emotions related to separations, including the separation that occurs at the end of visits.<sup>40</sup> Separation can be confusing for children as they lack the ability to understand why he or she cannot be with his or her parents. Depending on the age and developmental stage of the child, it may not be possible for the child to comprehend anything other than the fact that his or her parent is not there, and the upheaval and uncertainty that accompany removal can bring a range of emotions including anger, sadness, and

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<sup>37</sup> Id. See also the 2019 Family Treatment Court Best Practice Standards Provision D: High Quality Parenting Time (Visitation): [https://www.cffutures.org/files/OJJDP/FDCTTA/FTC\\_Standards.pdf#page=136](https://www.cffutures.org/files/OJJDP/FDCTTA/FTC_Standards.pdf#page=136)

<sup>38</sup> SAMHSA's Children Affected by Methamphetamine (CAM) program focused family treatment courts on evidence based parenting and children's services including a strategy of promoting parenting right away; participating sites shifted from "requiring" a length of time of sobriety or in the Family Treatment Court prior to beginning family time/visitation to supporting parenting time from the start of program participation. Sites found that actively engaging parents in decision making and parenting led to increased attendance for sessions when they were presented as an opportunity to focus on the needs of their children. A summary of that final report is here [https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/files/CAM\\_Brief\\_2014-Final.pdf](https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/files/CAM_Brief_2014-Final.pdf). Additional resources on lessons learned can be found at <https://www.cffutures.org/report/prevention-and-family-recovery-brief/> and [http://www.cffutures.org/files/PFR\\_Tompkins\\_Standard\\_Final2.pdf](http://www.cffutures.org/files/PFR_Tompkins_Standard_Final2.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> See Rich, C. (2010). *The effect of parental visitation on the emotional and behavioral stability of foster children*. Fresno: Alliant International University.

<sup>40</sup> Id.

depression.<sup>41</sup> It is important for social workers and legal professionals to be mindful of the complex emotional responses that children may experience and the different ways those emotions may be displayed. Reducing or restricting visitation based on negative child responses, rather than working with parents and youth to understand those reactions and ease anxiety, may further traumatize children in out-of-home care. Such reductions may also add trauma to parents and can be a disincentive for parental compliance with case plans.

### ***Best Practices***

Child welfare agencies, attorneys for parents, children, youth and child welfare agencies, judges, and CIPs can work together to ensure that family time is not unnecessarily supervised, ended or reduced contrary to research supporting positive outcomes for youth. Examples of such best practices include:

- Where children exhibit concerning behavior, child welfare professionals should seek out mental health professionals to help interpret the emotions and reactions children may exhibit before deciding to reduce family time.<sup>42</sup>
- Where there are threats of danger ensure, that they are specific, observable, immediate, carry severe consequences, and cannot be controlled.<sup>43</sup>
- Where there is a safety risk, agencies and courts should consider the protective capacities of caregivers in the home and the child or children to determine whether those protective factors will mitigate the identified risk before reducing or ending family time.<sup>44</sup>
- Agencies and courts should also consider additional protective factors that can be provided to help ensure safety before reducing or ending family time.<sup>45</sup>

### **III. Resources and Innovation to Support Strong Family Time Practice**

State and county child welfare agencies report that meaningful and frequent family time can be time and resource intensive for child welfare agencies and staff. The expense associated with providing supervision can be challenging. However, federal financial participation (FFP) is

<sup>41</sup> See generally, Dozier, M., Stovall, K.C., Albus, K. & Bates, B. (2001). Attachment for infants in foster care: The role of caregiver state of mind. *Child Development*, 72, 1467-1477; Haight, W., Black, J., Mangelsdorf, S., Giorgio, G., Tata, L., Schoppe, S., & Szewczyk, M. (2002). Making visits better: The perspectives of parents, foster parents, and child welfare workers. *Child Welfare*, LXXXI, 173-202.; Haight, W., Black, J., Workman, C. & Tata, L. (2001). Parent-child interaction during foster care visits: Implications for practice. *Social Work*, 46, 325-338; Stovall, K.C., & Dozier, M. (2000). The development of attachment in new relationships: Single subject analyses for 10 foster infants. *Development and Psychopathology*, 12, 133-156; Cantos, A.L. & Gries, L.T., (1997). Behavioral Correlates of Parental Visiting During Family Foster Care. *Child Welfare*, 76 (2) 309-330.

<sup>42</sup> See supra note 5, responses could be the result of ambiguity of loss, feelings of abandonment or other emotional responses depending on the developmental stage or trauma history of the child.

<sup>43</sup> See Therese Roe Lund & Jennifer Renne, *Child Safety: A Guide for Judges and Attorneys* 33-34 (2009) for a detailed analysis on how to balance safety threats and protective capacities and how judges can utilize information gained through application of a safety decision-making framework to craft thoughtful and effective visitation/family time plans.

<sup>44</sup> Id.

<sup>45</sup> Id.



available for certain costs associated with facilitating family time. There are also innovative approaches to facilitating family time that show promising results for families and require less agency staff time and resources.

### ***Federal Funding***

Funding may be available under titles IV-B and IV-E for certain activities that support family time. This IM provides only a basic overview of potentially available funding, and agencies should contact their [regional office](#) with questions about whether specific costs for activities that support family visits are allowable.

A title IV-B agency may utilize title IV-B, subpart 2 funds to pay for services and activities designed to facilitate access to and visitation of children with parents and siblings. Statute and regulation are broad regarding parenting time and visitation to allow jurisdictions flexibility in designing practices and providing support for family time practices that meet the unique needs of their communities.

A title IV-E agency may claim FFP for costs related to a child's travel to and from family visits as a foster care maintenance expense. Title IV-E agencies may claim FFP for allowable title IV-E foster care administrative costs, including activities closely related to case management and supervision (45 CFR 1356.60(c)(2)(vi)). Any such costs must be allocated through an approved cost allocation plan and the claims must be on behalf of a title IV-E eligible child or candidate for title IV-E foster care. States may not claim the transportation costs of a parent for visitation as a foster care maintenance payment nor an allowable administrative cost. See [Child Welfare Policy Manual section 8.3B.1](#) for additional information on allowable costs.

### ***Innovative Approaches***

A number of jurisdictions are increasing access to family time, improving the experiences of parents and children during family time and reducing the costs associated with facilitation (both transportation and staff time) by working with community-based organizations. Community-based organizations offer a variety of programs and services, such as support staff, peer mentors, family time or visit hosts, visit coaching, and/or convenient, nonthreatening space for families to spend time together. Where provided, jurisdictions report improved parental attendance, increased parental engagement, improved compliance with case plans, and reduced burden on the child welfare agency. Examples of innovative approaches include:

- New York City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) worked with community partners and providers to maintain and strengthen the relationships that parents have with their children when placement in out-of-home care is necessary. One such effort supported by the Center for Family Life (CFL), an ACS contracted service provider, redefines the concept of visitation entirely. CFL is a community-based provider in Brooklyn, NY. CFL operates a foster care program for ACS that focuses on building

positive relationships between parents with children in foster care and foster parents. CFL has set the expectation that parents with children in foster care will remain involved with the daily routines of their children's lives. Children are placed nearby where the parent lives, and the foster parent works directly with the parent to set daily schedules whereby the parent will regularly be in the foster home helping their children prepare for school, do homework, prepare and eat meals, play, and attend appointments or school events. The goal is meaningful and ongoing contact and involvement, seamlessly blending foster care and family time. CFL also provides additional support to parents and families to help build protective capacities, connections to community resources, and programs to promote economic mobility, which help increase the likelihood of sustained family reunification.

- The Center for Family Representation, a parental defender organization in NYC, has advocated for and helped support a "Visit Host" approach that promotes family-centered, community-based visitation practice. ACS and its community partners worked together to establish protocols and guidance for the agency and families to work together to identify non-agency staff that can supervise visits where supervision is necessary. A visit host is someone that the parent or family knows and trusts, that can assure the safety of the child, is invested in the well-being of the child and family, and is supportive of the parent and the family's attempts to reunify or maintain strong relationships. A host can bring participants together more frequently and for longer visits and has the flexibility to be creative in supporting families to spend time together in natural settings. CFR, one of many partners across the city that helps facilitate the approach, reports that visit hosts are used in approximately twenty percent of their cases where supervision has been deemed necessary, a significant reduction of burden on the child welfare agency.
- Hancock County, Mississippi has converted a former children's shelter into a family time meeting place. The building is set up to feel like a home and includes living room spaces, play space for children inside and outside, a reading room/library, and a functioning kitchen and dining area to allow families to spend time together in natural ways. Families are encouraged to bring food so they may prepare and share meals. The county provides groceries in the kitchen for families that may not be able to afford to bring food on their own so that they do not miss the opportunity for family dinners. Most notably, parents of infants may visit as often as they can attend for as long as they can be present to promote healthy parent child bonding and attachment.
- San Diego County implemented an approach to ensure family time helps enhance parenting skills and promotes relationships between parents and foster families. Working in partnership with Casey Family Services, the county has implemented a coaching

program for parents known as Visit Coaching.<sup>46</sup> Under the model, coaches train to help parents enhance or develop specific parenting skills and protective factors that allow them to parent more effectively. Visit coaches are not employees of the child welfare agency and therefore viewed as independent supports to the family. Coaches are also from the same community and/or cultural background of the families, which can help parents feel more comfortable. Visit coaches may supervise visits ordered to be monitored, but are also used where supervision is not mandated as a parental support and resource.

#### **IV. Recommendations**

CIPs, administrative offices of the courts, state and county judges, child welfare administrators, child welfare agency case workers, and attorneys for parents, children, youth and the child welfare agency all play essential roles and share common interests in protecting and strengthening the integrity of the parent-child relationship. The parent-child relationship is critical to the well-being of children and parents, except in the most egregious of situations where it would be harmful to the child. Ensuring that meaningful family time is a central component of every case plan for children in out-of-home care is a critical strategy for strengthening the parent-child relationship and promoting family well-being.

Studies indicate that the above parties should work collectively and in their individual capacities to implement these key principals associated with more meaningful and effective family time practices:

- Recognize family time as critical reasonable or active effort and centerpiece of case plans.
- Engage parents in family time discussions as early as possible, even before physical removal where possible, to seek their ideas and opinions on where, when, and how family time can occur.
- Create policy and promote practice that presumes family time should be unsupervised absent an identified present danger of harm.
- Work to identify and partner with community organizations that can supervise visits where supervision is necessary.
- Utilize non-threatening, natural, family-like settings for visits to occur.

##### *Recommendations for CIPs*

- Enhance or create training curriculum and educational opportunities to ensure judges are aware of the trauma caused by parent-child separation and the long-term impact removal can have, even as the result of short-term separation.

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<sup>46</sup> <http://martybever.com/content/visit-coaching>



- Enhance or create in-depth training on the importance of family time to child and parent well-being.
- Work with the Administrative Office of the Courts to create or update family time specific court rules that reflect current knowledge about the importance of family time in mitigating child trauma and expediting reunification.
- Create training opportunities for judges to lead detailed discussion of family time at every hearing and review, including making specific inquiries to attorneys for parents, children and youth and the child welfare agency on case specific family time needs.
- Create training opportunities for judges and attorneys that identify family time as a critical reasonable effort to finalize permanency goals of reunification and to normalize the foster care experience for children in out-of-home care.
- Include qualitative measures that look at the substance of family time discussions and decisions in court observation and other instruments utilized as part of mandatory CIP hearing quality projects. Utilize data to continuously improve legal and judicial aspects of family time planning and decision-making.

#### *Recommendations for Judges*

- Become familiar with trauma research and the impact that parent-child separation has on children.
- Consider family time a critical reasonable or active effort that the agency must make to finalize permanency goals of reunification.
- Routinely ask parent attorneys and attorneys for children and youth about the adequacy of and satisfaction with the family time plan.
- Routinely ask the agency attorney for detailed accountings of the agency's efforts to ensure family time is occurring in accordance with the case plan.
- Make findings of no reasonable efforts to finalize a permanency goal of reunification where the agency has not provided adequate evidence that it has provided meaningful family time.
- Set clear expectations that agencies individually tailor family time plans to meet the specific needs and circumstances of each individual child and family.
- Order unsupervised family time unless specifically contraindicated by safety threats to the child or based on the specific needs/circumstances of the child.
- Require detailed family time plans and proactively monitor family time by requiring detailed updates on the progress with family time at every hearing and review.

#### *Recommendations for Attorneys of Parents, Children, Youth, and the Child Welfare Agency*

- Remain cognizant that parent-child separation, even when necessary or for short time periods, causes trauma to children and parents.

- Help locate and involve relatives or kin supportive of parent child contact when removal is necessary.
- Advocate for parent-child contact as soon as possible after removal to help mitigate child trauma and ambiguity of loss.
- Be creative in recommendations of where, when, and how initial contact and ongoing family time occur.
- Ensure substantive discussion of family time occurs in every hearing or review where a child is in out-of-home care.
- Advocate for sibling time where siblings are in separate placements.
- Know the factors that can make family time logistically and emotionally challenging for parents and children, anticipate needs, and identify resources to mitigate those challenges.
- Contest unnecessary supervision of family time.

*Recommendations for Child Welfare Agency Leadership (including directors, managers and supervisors)*

- Be mindful that removal, even when necessary or for a short period of time, is traumatic to both children and their parents.
- Recognize family time as central to fulfilling the agency's mission and responsibilities under the law and that agency leadership should:
  - create a clear vision for what family time should look like in the state, counties, and communities;
  - identify what the agency will do to operationalize that vision; and
  - craft agency policy and procedures to support the vision, and provide training, supervision and coaching to ensure fidelity to the vision.
- Involve all levels of staff, the legal and judicial community, parents and youth with lived child welfare experience, community members, and private, public, and faith-based partners in crafting the vision.
- Identify public, private and faith-based partners to help implement and support the vision.
- Craft and implement policy and support case work practice that is rooted in an understanding that the quality of family time is affected deeply by where and how it occurs and that natural environments and unsupervised family time should be arranged absent identified, immediate danger of harm to the child.
- Create and maintain a culture that promotes the vision for family time within the agency and incentivizes or rewards caseworker efforts in promoting meaningful family time.
- Provide supervision and coaching to support caseworker efforts in ensuring meaningful family time.
- Facilitate and support ways for caseworkers to share routinely what they are doing to ensure family time with their peers and learn from one another.

- Work with community partners, including private and faith-based organizations to identify more home-like settings that may be appropriate for supervised visitation.
- Access title IV-E reimbursement to promote high quality legal representation for parents that will help ensure higher levels of parental engagement, identify family strengths and resources, all of which can support strong and effective family time practice.

#### *Recommendations for Caseworkers*

- Be mindful that removal, even when necessary and for short time periods, is traumatic to both children and their parents.
- Take all steps necessary to assure the parent that family time will be a top priority before removal.
- Arrange family time as soon as possible after removal, arranging contact within 24 hours or less of the initial removal, unless there is a clear and present safety threat to the child.
- Speak with the parents as early as possible to identify family members, friends, or other trusted adults the parents may know that can help where supervised visitation may be necessary.
- Ensure that family time is a central part of every case plan.
- Remain aware that frequent family time can help reduce trauma to both parents and children and can help the family move toward permanency sooner.
- Understand that where and how visits occur affect the quality of family time, and that agencies should arrange for visits to occur in natural and unsupervised environments, absent identified immediate danger of harm to the child.
- Reinforce the importance of all families, families of origin, and resource families, calling the child by the same name, following the same care practices (like eating and toilet learning), and speaking without judgment or criticism about each other during family time and throughout the child's time in care.
- Provide continuity in transportation for visits with the parents, i.e., transportation should be done by the same staff in the same vehicle as much as possible, as routine helps to reduce stress.
- Think of family time broadly as involving the parent as much as possible in day-to-day child rearing activities that allow for parental participation in normal daily experiences of their children's lives, e.g., school activities, doctor appointments, recreational activities, assistance with school work in the resource home.

#### **V. Conclusion**

Research is clear that frequent quality family time is a vital component of expedited reunification and positive well-being outcomes for children and families. We strongly encourage child welfare agencies, CIPs, judges, attorneys and other stakeholders to review the research, best



practices, funding sources, and recommendations related to providing family time, and work together to ensure that frequent quality family time is provided to all parents, children, and youth consistent with child safety. We further urge all jurisdictions never to use family time as reward or punishment as such practices are inconsistent with federal law and harmful to the well-being of children and parents.

**Inquiries:** [CB Regional Program Managers](#)

/s/

Elizabeth Darling  
Commissioner,  
Administration on Children, Youth and  
Families

**Disclaimer:** IMs provide information or recommendations to States, Tribes, grantees, and others on a variety of child welfare issues. IMs do not establish requirements or supersede existing laws or official guidance.

## VI. Resources

Applying the Science of Child Development in Child Welfare Systems

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/child-welfare-systems/>

Child and Family Visitation: A Practice Guide to Support Lasting Reunification and Preserving Family Connections for Children in Foster Care (Minnesota)(placement, visitation)

<https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Legacy/DHS-5552-ENG>

[Child Safety: A Guide for Judges and Attorneys by the American Bar Association](#)

[Developmental Issues for Young Children in Foster Care by the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption and Dependent Care \(2000\)](#)

Enhanced Resource Guidelines: National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

<http://www.ncjfcj.org/ncjfcj-releases-enhanced-resource-guidelines>

Evidence Base for Avoiding Family Separation in Child Welfare Practice: An Analysis of Current Research. (2019). Commissioned by [Alia](https://researchbrief.aliainnovations.org/). <https://researchbrief.aliainnovations.org/>

Family Services or Family Preservation plan: dated January 2016 Policy 1.6 (Wyoming)  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6DSpyyE-UEST2ZrNGdLV2RWY2M/view?pref=2&pli=1>

Georgia Family Time Practice Guide: A Guide to Providing Appropriate Family Time for Children in Foster Care.  
<http://www.gacip.org/family-time-practice-guide/>

[Mental Health Assessments for Infants and Toddlers by the American Bar Association in Child Law Practice \(Vol. 24 No.9\) 129-139 \(2005\)](#)

[Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8 \(2016\) by The National Academies: Sciences, Engineering, & Medicines](#)

[Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People: Progress and Possibilities \(2009\) by The National Academies: Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine](#)

Reasonable Efforts: A Judicial Perspective, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges –Handbook on Reasonable Efforts by Len Edwards  
<http://www.ncjfcj.org/resource-library/publications/reasonable-efforts-judicial-perspective>

RISE Magazine [www.risemagazine.org](http://www.risemagazine.org) Video and Parenting Tips

[Visitation with Infants and Toddlers in Foster Care: What Judges and Attorneys Need to Know by the American Bar Association \(2007\)](#)

## Planning for Family Time

### Preparing

- Family time should occur in places that provide as homelike and familiar a setting as possible, while also maintaining safety.
- The visiting space should be comfortable, clean, relatively quiet, and include age-appropriate toys and activities.
- Prepare the child and parents by setting realistic expectations, suggesting parenting strategies, and offering guidance on structuring the visit. Acknowledge any fears expressed and reassure the parent and the child.
- Work with the parent to set an intention for each Family Time, clearly identifying a desire or a focus that will strengthen the parent-child relationship. For example, if reunification is the permanency goal consider suggesting the following activities, cuddling and reading together, playing on the floor together, feeding or bathing the child, talking and using words while playing, practicing nurturing interactions, reading the child's cues to match their needs, any family or cultural rituals like hair styling, prayers, or birthday songs.
- Ensure the placement provider is aware of Family Time and will help to prepare the child.
- Encourage the parent to bring toys, food, or meaningful items from home. Encourage the placement provider to send a favorite toy or comfort item with the child.
- Placement providers can also help children prepare for visits and transition afterward. They may transport children to and from visits and, in some cases, monitor the visits or offer ongoing coaching or support to the child's parents. When the placement provider and the child's parents work as parenting partners, both during and outside of visits, the benefits include more normalcy for children, sharing of information, easing of children's concerns about friction between the placement provider and their parent, and a greater chance for successful reunification.

### During Family Time:

- What happens during family time depends on many factors, including the identified case goals, the age of the child, how long the visits have been happening, the location of the visit, and even the time of year.
- Family Time and Contact Plans should include a parenting skills component, so the interaction during the visit may be a chance for the parent to practice new ways to engage their child.
- Assess for safety during Family Time
- Whenever possible, and approved by the court, unsupervised Family Time should occur.
- Create opportunities for the parent to accompany the placement provider on a visit to the child's doctor or a school event, which can further enhance the connection between parents and their children.
- Routinely encourage the parent to help the child feel secure and safe.
- Observe interactions between the parent and child to determine if they are developmentally appropriate and to assess the level of engagement.
- Help the parent understand the child's behaviors are connected to their emotions.
- Consider how to assist the parent and placement provider in sharing normal duties of parenting.

**After Family Time:**

- At the conclusion of each visit, provide additional feedback.
- The transparency of the feedback process helps to build trust between yourself and the parent.
- Discuss with the parents what worked and areas of growth for next time.
- Check in with the child directly or if that isn't possible with the placement provider to hear the child's reaction and provide support.

## Shared Parenting Benefits Everyone!

### Shared Parenting Benefits for Everyone

- Feelings of grief and loss that both a child and a birth parent might feel upon separating are minimized. Children can see their birth family is okay and still loves them—this can help a child relax.
- The child's relationship with the birth parent can be maintained.
- Resource parents can form a realistic picture of the birth parent's strengths and needs.
- The birth parents can be reassured that their child is in a nurturing and stable home.
- Resource parents can model effective parenting. By knowing what good parenting looks like, birth parents can practice parenting skills.
- Resource parents can ask birth parents about the child's schedules, fears, allergies, sleep habits, likes, and dislikes. Resource parents can also learn culturally specific child-care strategies from birth family members, which can enhance a child's cultural identity.
- Birth parents can view the resource family as a resource rather than a threat.
- Planning for visitation can be simplified.
- Transitions back into the birth parent's home can be smoother.
- After the child returns home, there can be ongoing support.

Source: Families Rising (Adoptalk 2018, Issue 2)



## Making Shared Parenting Work

**Making Shared Parenting Work**

A social worker should facilitate a meeting between the birth parents and foster parents within a week of placement to ensure that the partnership has a strong beginning and is supported by the agency. This requires advanced planning by social workers so that both families understand the purpose of the meeting (to discuss the care of the child, not "the case".)

Every effort must be made to locate any absent/non-custodial parents. Including absent/non-custodial parents early in the shared parenting meetings encourages both parents of the child to become more involved in the child's life. (Depending on the nature of the relationship between the custodial parent and the absent/non-custodial parent, a separate meeting between each birth parent and foster parent may be necessary).

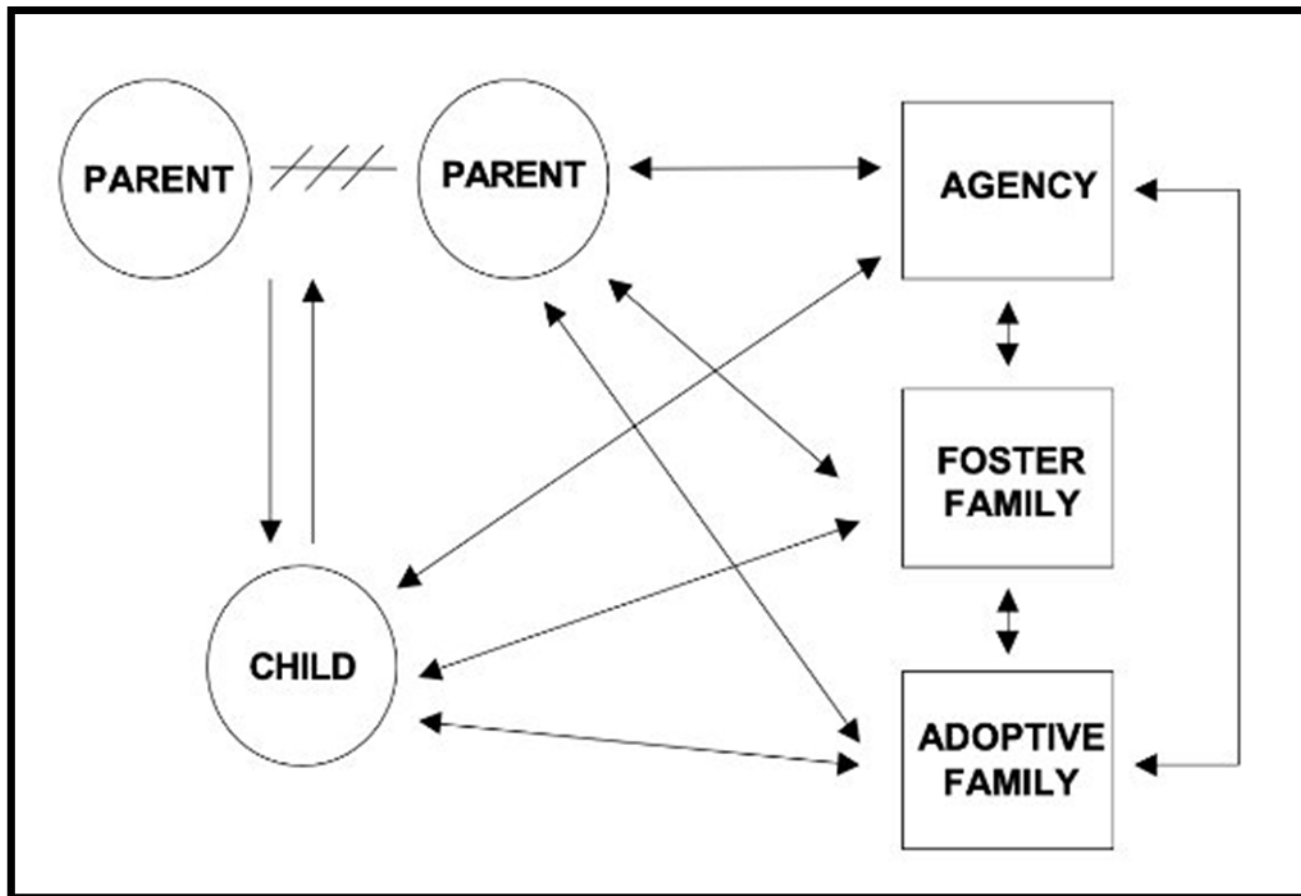
A meeting site that is a neutral location that allows for privacy is important. Sometimes neighborhood recreation or social centers are good options instead of the agency office.

**Tips that social workers can use:**

- Ask foster and birth parents at placement how they would like to meet (consider facilitating a conference call or web meeting if distance prevents a parent from attending a face to face meeting)
- Describe shared parenting meetings in positive terms
- Serve as positive role model to foster parents and birth parents
  - Talk positively about birth parent to foster parent
  - Talk positively about foster parent to birth parent
  - Maintain confidentiality
  - Describe foster parent in non-identifying terms at placement
- ❖ Brief foster parents on birth parents' fears and needs and help foster parents understand these needs.
- Talk openly with all about their concerns
- ❖ Share information essential to shared parental responsibilities with foster parents and birth parents, i.e., medical information, school progress, goals, and the child's strengths and needs

- Set clear boundaries and ground rules for contact that include input from the birth family, the foster family, and the agency
  - Address personal and emotional safety issues for the child, birth family, and foster family
  - Set ground rules regarding phone calls, visitation, transportation
- Assist foster parent/ birth parent in managing conflict
  - Recognize fears of both parties
  - Focus on strengths
  - Look beyond behaviors to identify needs
  - Develop interventions that meet needs
- Assist foster parent/ birth parent in understanding cultural differences
  - Cultivate a mutual understanding and appreciation of religious beliefs and practices
  - Openly discuss differences in rituals, family experiences, dress and appearance preferences, etc.
- Convey the benefits of aligning around parenting and discipline practices to insure consistency for the child
- Facilitate conversations between birth parent/ foster parent
  - Discuss non-threatening topics
  - Find common areas of interest
  - Recognize both families' strengths
  - Use of self-disclosure
  - Reflect feelings
  - Encourage exchange of information between birth parent and foster parent, i.e. favorite foods, toys, sleep behaviors, pictures, school progress, etc.
- Encourage foster parent and birth parent to attend all school and medical appointments
- ❖ Encourage the two families to work on the child's life book together with the child
- Encourage the two families to attend parenting classes together
- ❖ Initiate discussion with families about strategies that they may use that will support the child's relationship and attachment with both sets of parents to avoid dividing the child's alliance.

## The Alliance Model of Child Welfare Practice



The Alliance Model is an idea developed for staff and parents in child welfare to promote partnerships in parenting.

An alliance in a family refers to two members sharing a common goal or interest that is not detrimental to any other members of the family.

- The lines and arrows in the diagram represent alliances.
- The slash marks across diagram lines represent a damaged or broken alliance.
- Solid lines represent positive alliances.

When there is a broken alliance between members, a child is forced to develop two separate alliances between parties in order to survive.



Reflection and End of Day Values Sheet		
		
Self-Values Reflection	Reasonable Efforts	Two Level Decision-Making