

## VISITATION

### **Visitation provides reassurance to the child and family...**

- Children know they have not been abandoned
- Family knows that the agency wants to help them reconnect with their child
- Parents and child can see that each other is well
- Preserves continuity of relationships
- Promotes psychological well-being

### **Visitation is essential for a child's well-being...**

The primary purpose of visitation is to maintain the parent-child attachment, reduce a child's sense of abandonment, and preserve their sense of belonging as part of a family and community. A child needs to see and have regular contact with their parent(s), as this relationship is the foundation of child development.

### **Visitation is fundamental to permanency...**

Visitation facilitates permanency planning, promotes timely reunification, and helps in the decision-making process to establish alternative permanency plans. Visitation maintains and support the parent-child relationship necessary for successful reunification.

### **Visitation is vital to child maintaining family relationships and cultural connections...**

Maintaining family connections has life-long significance for a child. Visitation maintains their relationships with siblings and others who have a significant role in the child's life. When A child loses family connection, they also lose family history, medical history and cultural information. Visitation is considered they heart of reunification, but even when reunification is not likely, parents, siblings and extended family continue to be important in children's lives.

### **Engaging fathers in visitation...**

Fathers have a significant impact of the lives of their children, and should receive equal consideration and involvement in visitation planning. Once the agency identifies the father and determines his role in the family, consider the following practices to increase the father's involvement in visitation:

- Make efforts to immediately identify and contact fathers when a child is placed.
- Discuss with both parents the importance of father's involvement in their child's life. This should be discussed with other members of the case (child, other relatives), even if the mother is resistant to paternal involvement.

## **Kinship/Foster parents' role in visitation...**

Foster parents are essential partners to maintaining connections between children and people who are important to them. The following are responsibilities kinship/foster parents agree to accept upon licensure and re-licensure:

- No withholding of basic needs, including but not limited to: family visits, or no restrictions on a child's communication beyond the restrictions specified in the service plan, unless the restriction is approved by the DCYF/Family Court.
- Respect the importance of family to a child and make every effort to keep this relationship alive. Respect the importance of the out-of-home placement plan and comply with all requirements. A kinship/foster family should be willing and understanding to make adjustments to accommodate visitation whenever feasible. Acknowledgement the effect of separation on a child, and the difficulties of adjusting to a new environment.
- Make every effort to understand and be patient in addressing challenging behaviors that result from separation and grieving.
- Maintain continuous contact with the supervising agency regarding matters significant to the adjustment and welfare of a child, including reporting behaviors, problematic or otherwise, that would help agency staff to understand their current emotional and behavioral state.
- Keep information about a child and their family confidential and discuss only with appropriate agency staff member and other professionals designated by the agency.

### **Additional best practice recommendations for kinship/foster parents:**

- Be actively involved in visits, model healthy child-parent interaction, teach parenting skills, or share information agreed to in the out-of-home placement plan.
- Provide emotional support, even when contact with parent(s) and siblings is disruptive or confusing to a child.
- Document a child's behavior after visits as requested by the social caseworker or as preferred by the foster parents.
- Have children ready for each contact, including having clothes packed, or support the visit with necessary supplies, such as diapers or special food.
- Consider ways to prepare a child for visits, and share information about their daily life, such as sending recent information from the school, school projects, or pictures of their child doing a chore.
- Ensure that parent(s) are aware of their child's activities and school events. Promote inclusion of the child's activities as part of the visitation plan. When a parent cannot attend activities, provide pictures.
- Provide transportation as agreed to/from visits, whenever feasible.
- Comfort and reassure a child in ways that are helpful following a visit, such as encouraging them to be open about expressing their feelings.
- Be flexible in scheduling visitation so that a child is able to have the maximum amount of contact. When face-to-face visits are not possible, plan with the social caseworker how to accommodate with telephone calls, contact by Web camera via internet, email, or other options so parent(s) and children can maintain frequent contact.

- Notify the social caseworker of any unplanned contact between a child and parent(s) or between foster parent(s) and parent(s).
- Talk positively about parent(s) to a child and to others.
- Discuss reactions to visiting arrangements with the social caseworker, not the child or parent(s).
- Ensure that children have pictures of their parent(s), siblings and other important people, and a way to display them. If a child does not have pictures, ask the parent(s) or social caseworker for them.
- Be curious about a child's cultural and family practices, as this information can be helpful to support visitation, such as knowing that the mother and the children enjoy card games, or their favorite cookie is oatmeal/raisin, that they celebrate Kwanza, they make egg rolls together, regularly attend local baseball games, or pick strawberries in the spring. Every family has their own practices that are often connected to their culture and family history. Obtaining this information can be significant to promoting frequent visitation, supporting reunification, and preserving a child's cultural and community connections.
- Relative foster parents had a previous relationship with the child and parent(s), and their visitation role may need additional supports and considerations. Relative and kinship caregivers may be especially challenged when a child is upset or acts out after visits. They may also need extra support from social case workers or other family members in understanding the challenges of loyalty issues, the importance of the visitation plan, and maintaining appropriate boundaries. The social caseworkers' role as a liaison between the relative/kinship caregiver and parent(s) is key in promoting communication and encouraging understanding between parties, and preserving placement stability.

### **Remember the child may experience/feel...**

- Feeling happy and excited about visits with their parent(s), but for children of any age, there may be times when they become upset either prior, during, or after a visit.
- Normal feelings of loss and separation reactivated by seeing the parent(s) which can have an effect on the child's mood, ability to cope, and their behavior.
- Being anxious and fearful when visiting with their parent(s); their time together may be very stressful.
- Children experiencing a conflict in loyalty and feeling a need to reject the foster parent(s) when returning to the foster home to affirm their love for their parent(s).
- Feeling a loss or lack of control.
- A child thinking that it is their fault they cannot go home.
- Being confused about why they cannot go home.
- Not being able to talk about confusion or tears.
- A child being defensive when feeling that their parent(s) are being criticized.
- Regressing to babyish behavior, whining, having nightmares, wetting the bed, becoming aggressive, and being unable to listen, and/or complain of physical pain before and/or after visits.

## **In summary kinship/foster parents should...**

- Have a positive attitude towards visitation
- Be flexible to allow for visitation to occur between the child and their family
- Confirm pick up and drop off times with social caseworker/provider
- Pack a bag for the child, including diapers and wipes (if applicable), food/snacks, change of clothing and toys/activities for child
- Inform transporter of any recent updates as to the child i.e. child had immunization shots earlier in the day, child didn't sleep well, child appears to be coming down with a cold (runny nose) – pack tissues
- If applicable, share journal and/or photos with parents
- In unsure, ask for identification of the person from the Department picking up the child
- Provide transporter with your contact phone number in the event that parent does not arrive or visit needs to end early
- If supervising the visits yourself, provide ongoing updates to social caseworker